

THE CALLING OF A PART-TIME PASTOR:
DEVELOPING A GUIDEBOOK FOR SMALL CHURCH LEADERS
IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

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Dedicated to
my wife, Ruth,
and members of the West Copake Reformed Church,
for your
partnership in the gospel.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project is focused on providing assistance to smaller churches in the Reformed Church in America in the process of calling a part-time pastor. The goal is to produce a guidebook for leaders of these small churches addressing the unique challenges of ministry in a small church with a part-time pastor. To this end, the role of part-time ministers is explored, both historical and contemporary. This work includes personal interviews along with a review of related literature. Theological issues regarding the call to ministry of part-time pastors, the mission of the church, and small church leadership are explored.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am a bi-vocational pastor.¹ For three years, from 2010-20013, I served as a part-time pastor in a small congregation of the Reformed Church in America in central New Jersey while also working as a Registered Nurse in the emergency department of a local hospital in the same community as the church. At one time—not long ago—my pastorate there would have been highly unusual: as little as ten years ago, there were not many part-time pastors in that classis,² nor were there many churches that needed to call a part-time pastor. Most of the congregations in the Classis of Delaware-Raritan were financially and numerically equipped to support a full-time minister and, as a result, ten years ago that classis had only two churches being served by a part-time pastor.³ Today, however, one half of the churches in the Classis of Delaware-Raritan are served by a part-time pastor and many other churches in the Regional Synod of Mid-

¹ I define a bivocational pastor as a person who serves a local congregation as their solo or senior pastor and who also maintains additional employment elsewhere. This may include a secular job, another ministry setting, or even another local church. I will use the terms bivocational pastor and part-time pastor interchangeably throughout this work, while acknowledging that some part-time pastors do not have additional employment outside the single church they serve. See: Dennis W. Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 2; Luther M. Dorr, *The Bivocational Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1988), 3;; and Robert LaRochelle, *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2010), 22-32. LaRochelle describes in detail the various settings and models for bivocational ministry typically found in the United States today.

² A classis is a regional governing body of the Reformed Church in America comprised of all ordained ministers in the classis as well as at least one elder from each church in the classis. The classis is responsible for the supervision of all churches and ordained ministers in their body. See: Reformed Church in America, *Book of Church Order* (2012), 29. I was a member of the Classis of Delaware-Raritan which consists of 30 churches as of 2015.

³ 2003 Statistical Data of the Reformed Church in America, reported in *The Acts and Proceedings of the 198th Regular Session of the General Synod* (2004) 436-437.

Atlantics⁴ are challenged in the same way. In fact, of the 136 churches in the Regional Synod of Mid-Atlantics, 61 of them (45%) are presently being served by part-time pastors, or are seeking to call a part-time pastor, and that number has been predicted to rise to a majority of churches (53%) within the next 5 years.⁵

A Broader Perspective

Yet this trend is not limited to the Classis of Delaware-Raritan or the Regional Synod of Mid-Atlantics. In the Regional Synod of Albany, for example, the Classis of Albany reports that 10 of their 20 churches are being served by part-time pastors, or are vacant and seeking to call a part-time pastor, and predict that in the next five years at least 2 more churches will also be looking for a part-time pastor.⁶ Also in the Regional Synod of Albany, the Classis of Columbia-Greene, where I now serve as a bivocational pastor, reports that 18 of their 20 churches are served or are seeking to be served by a part-time pastor and believe that, within the next five years, all 20 of their churches—a full 100 percent—may be served by a part-time pastor.⁷

⁴ A regional synod is an assembly and judicatory consisting of representative ordained ministers and ordained elders from each classis within the bounds of the regional synod. The regional synod exercises general superintendence over the interests and concerns of each of the member classes. See: Reformed Church in America, *Book of Church Order*, (2012) 59. I was a member of the Regional Synod of Mid-Atlantics which was composed of 4 classes representing 136 churches in 2013.

⁵ Stated clerks of the Regional Synod of Mid-Atlantics, reported in an e-mail survey sent by the author to all stated clerks in the Reformed Church in America, on May, 3, 2013.

⁶ Stated clerks of the Classis of Albany, reported in an e-mail survey sent by the author to all stated clerks in the Reformed Church in America, on May 3, 2013.

⁷ Stated clerks Classis of Columbia-Greene, reported in an e-mail survey sent by the author to all stated clerks in the Reformed Church in America on May, 3, 2013.

This trend is not confined to smaller churches of the Reformed Church in America. Nor is it a regional pattern particular to the northeastern United States, as the above survey of the Reformed Church in America may suggest.⁸ According to Lyle Schaller, the small church today is “the dominant institutional expression of Protestant Christianity on the North American continent” and predicts that by the year 2020 almost 50% of all Protestant churches on this continent will have less than 100 people at an average Sunday worship service.⁹ A growing number of these churches, he insists, will depend upon bivocational ministers.¹⁰ David R. Ray reports that two-thirds of all the Protestant churches in the United States already have less than 100 people in average worship attendance.¹¹ Dennis Bickers states there are more than 100,000 churches in this country with 50 or fewer in their Sunday morning attendance.¹² These smaller churches will simply not be able to afford the ministry of a full-time pastor. According to Bethany DeVos, chairperson of the congregational care committee of the Classis of Delaware-Raritan, the “rule-of-thumb” for our churches being able to afford a full-time pastor in today’s economy is these congregations having an average worship attendance

⁸ The stated clerks of many of the classes of the Reformed Church in America declined to respond to the survey despite repeated e-mail and telephone requests, except for most in the eastern part of the USA.

⁹ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios for Tomorrow* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 12.

¹⁰ Schaller, 13.

¹¹ David R. Ray, *The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), xi.

¹² Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2005), 13.

above 100 people.¹³ But this number may not hold true for long.

Dennis Bickers believes that more and more churches in the coming years, even those that were previously not considered small (100-125 average worship attendance) will be served by part-time ministers. “Bivocational ministers serving in larger churches,” he writes, “will represent a paradigm shift for many denominations, churches, and ministers. A church of 125 is considered a rather healthy church in many traditions.” Yet, he continues, “these traditions will have to reexamine how they assign or recommend ministers to these churches.”¹⁴ What he has in view are the increasing financial challenges of supporting full-time ministers due to growing salary, pension, and health insurance requirements.¹⁵

As we can see, the ability to pay an adequate salary for a pastor is not just a concern for churches of 50 and 60 people but increasingly is seen in churches 2-3 times that size. According to Hartford Seminary’s “2010 Faith Communities Today Survey,” 30% of mainline churches already have a part-time pastor serving their congregations as the sole or senior pastor.¹⁶ In the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, nearly ¾ of their congregations have less than 100

¹³ Bethany DeVos, report given during a regular stated meeting of the Classis of Delaware-Raritan, October 8, 2012, at North and Southampton Reformed Church, Churchville, PA.

¹⁴ Bickers, *The Work*, 19.

¹⁵ Bickers, *The Work*, 18.

¹⁶ Hartford Seminary, “2010 Faith Communities Today Survey,” as reported by G. Jeffrey MacDonald, “Churches Turn to Part-Time Clergy” in *Christian Century* (September 18, 2013), 16-17.

people at worship on a Sunday morning and approximately ½ of all Southern Baptist churches nationwide are already relying upon bivocational pastors.¹⁷

I suspect these numbers might actually be higher, especially in the Reformed Church in America. Several practices contribute to an under-reporting. First, some of our churches list as a full-time pastor someone who is not being “fully funded” by the church they serve.¹⁸ Their pastor’s health insurance is actually provided by their spouse’s employment; if the church had to provide the pastor’s family with health insurance, they would not be able to afford the service of a full-time pastor.¹⁹

Additionally, some of our pastors have agreed to take a greater number of weeks off per year instead of receiving the classis minimum salary or the required yearly raises, sometimes as many as 8-10 weeks per year.²⁰ These pastors are still reported as full-time pastors even though they may only be serving the church about three-quarters of the year. Another creative way of structuring a full-time call is for the pastor to “voluntarily” contribute 20% or 30% of their salary back to the church. These double or triple “tithes,” as they are sometimes called, are negotiated between the church

¹⁷ Bob Smietetara, “More Preachers Need a Day-job, Too,” *USA Today* (February 2, 2010), accessed April 4, 2003, http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-06-21-preachers20_ST_N.htm.

¹⁸ Bickers, *The Work*, 3. Bickers prefers to use the term “fully funded” to refer to full-time pastors. According to his definition, which I agree with, if the church is not providing the health insurance package; is not meeting the minimum salary guidelines of a governing body; or is excluding the allowance the minister is supposed to receive for car, education, or professional expenses, then they do not have a full-time or “fully funded” pastor. Instead, what they have is a pastor they are paying part-time but are expecting full-time service from.

¹⁹ When their current pastor leaves, they may only be able to afford to call a part-time pastor, which was the case in one of the churches I served.

²⁰ Some “full-time” pastors, for example, are given the full summer off as compensation, as revealed in discussions with colleagues regarding compensation.

leaders and the pastor without the knowledge of the classis and often without the knowledge of the church members.²¹ As far as most people believe, the pastor of that church is still a full-time, or fully-funded, minister.

In all these innovative arrangements, it must be noted, these churches are not funding a full-time pastor. They are funding a part-time pastor while expecting the ministry of a full-time pastor. If that pastor leaves, they would only be able to compensate a part-time pastor. This means that the number of “part-time” ministers in the Reformed Church in America is likely higher than currently reported. And many of our churches are only a pastor away—after their present pastor leaves or retires from their under-funded position—from becoming what others call a “part-time church.”²²

A Historical Perspective

This might suggest to many in our contemporary church that bivocational ministry is a new trend—or a new problem—that the church has to acknowledge, study, and overcome today so the divine work of the church may continue into the future. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, bivocational ministry is not a new phenomenon in the church at all, but has always existed and has always provided vital and fruitful ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.²³ Luther M. Dorr, in *The Bivocational*

²¹ This is a practice that even I have used in the past, along with at least two other pastors in my classis.

²² I do not like the term “part-time church” although it is commonly used in my denomination to describe a church being served by a part-time or bivocational pastor. I agree with Robert LaRochelle that a church can have a part-time pastor while having an identity and ministry as a full-time church. See: LaRochelle, xi.

²³ Bickers, *The Work*, 15.

Pastor, devotes two whole chapters for making the case that bivocational ministry was the dominant form of ministry in the early church and remained significant all throughout the years, insisting that during eras like the early church, the monastic period and even the Reformation, bivocational ministry was the “norm” for much of the church.²⁴ A careful study of church history demonstrates that what is actually “new” in the church is full-time clergy. Even today, the majority of pastors serving in our churches in North America, and certainly the majority of churches throughout the world, are part-time pastors.²⁵

A careful review of the history of the Reformed Church in America also reveals some helpful, but long overlooked facts, about bivocational pastors during the formative years of my denomination. Many of our members and pastors will likely be able to recall that the apostle Paul was a “tentmaker” as well as a pastor, evangelist, and church planter. Some church history aficionados in our ranks would know that some of our early Church Fathers were bivocational ministers: Chrysostom a farmer-pastor; Spyridon, bishop of Cyprus, a shepherd-pastor; Dionysius, as a physician-pastor; and that Benedict of Nursia required all the brothers in the Benedictine order, including himself, to occupy themselves with manual labor to financially support themselves. But very few members or even pastors in the Reformed Church in America will be able to

²⁴ Dorr, 21.

²⁵ Kennon L. Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations: Creating Strengths and Health for Your Congregation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 13. Callahan positively insists “The twenty-first century is the century of small, strong congregations,” 12-13. Perhaps the 21st century will also be the century of the part-time pastor.

tell you the very first pastors in the Reformed Church in America were bivocational pastors and that many of our most recognized pastors from the early years of the Reformed Church in America were also bivocational pastors.

Jan Huyck and Bastian Krol, the first two men who were sent to the United States in 1620s by the Dutch West India Company to provide pastoral care to the early settlers in what is now known as the New York City and Albany, New York, also maintained other vocations while performing their pastoral duties. These men, called “comforters of the sick,” were not ordained ministers but were nonetheless charged with conducting worship, leading prayer services, catechizing the young, and visiting the sick.²⁶ These duties were later expanded to include performing marriages and baptisms.²⁷ They were not permitted to celebrate the Lord’s Supper or preach sermons of their own, but by reading approved sermons and following the prescribed liturgy of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, these men effectively pastored these colonial communities. At the same time, Jan Huyck was a storekeeper for the Dutch West India Company,²⁸ Bastian Krol was an agent of the West India Company,²⁹ and it is believed that both continued in these dual-roles even after the first ordained minister arrived in 1628.³⁰

²⁶ Howard G. Hageman, *Lily Among the Thorns* (New York: Half Moon Press, 1953), 57.

²⁷ Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 13.

²⁸ Arie R. Brouwer, *Reformed Church Roots* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 33.

²⁹ De Jong, 13.

³⁰ De Jong, 14.

Many of these early ordained ministers struggled financially to serve our churches. Although they were paid by the Dutch West India Company the same wage as their colleagues in the Netherlands, the cost of living was four times higher in the American colonies.³¹ This made it extremely difficult for a pastor to support a family. It was not unusual, then, to find these early ministers in the Reformed Church in America pursuing an additional trade, often as a farmer or schoolteacher. Jonas Michaelius, the first ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America, worked a farm to make ends meet.³² Johannes Megapolensis, who served in a two church pastorate in the Netherlands before becoming the first pastor of the Fort Orange congregation in Albany, New York, was also expected to provide “duties and favors” for the local governor, or “patroon,”³³ as well as the pastoral needs of his church.³⁴ Gideon Schaats was called to pastor churches in Albany and Rensselaer while also supplementing his “wages” as the village schoolmaster.³⁵ These famous early pastors in the Reformed Church in America were, by definition, bivocational pastors.

Notice, Schaats was called to pastor two churches at the same time. This is also, by definition, a regular form of bivocational ministry. Not surprisingly, we find this a common practice in the early days of the colonial church where both the villages and

³¹ De Jong, 22.

³² De Jong, 27.

³³ A Dutch term for a local, or provincial governor, given authority by the Dutch government.

³⁴ De Jong, 22.

³⁵ De Jong, 25.

churches were often small. Johannes Casparus Freyenmoet was called to pastor churches in Kinderhook, Claverack, and Livingston Manor, New York.³⁶ Laurentius Van Gaasbeek was the pastor of congregations in Kingston, Hurley, and Marbletown, New York.³⁷ David Marinus received a call extended by the congregations of Passaic, Pompton, Plains, and Paterson, New Jersey.³⁸ Even the prominent Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, often credited with sparking “The Great Awakening” in America along with William Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield,³⁹ received his call to come to America by agreeing to serve a pastorate consisting of four churches in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey.⁴⁰

In 1664, when the English gained control over the territory formerly held by the Dutch, the Dutch West India Company withdrew its financial support of the pastors. And as one historian writes, “The people were not accustomed to making contributions in sufficient amounts to pay salaries and support the church, and the ministers found themselves without funds with which to provide their daily bread.”⁴¹ Some went door to door asking their members for regular contributions; others like Samuel Megapolensis, son of Johannes Megapolensis, decided this was too degrading and

³⁶ De Jong, 115.

³⁷ De Jong, 67.

³⁸ De Jong, 115.

³⁹ Willard Dayton Brown, *History of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1928), 59.

⁴⁰ De Jong, 173-174.

⁴¹ Brown, 38-39.

returned to the Netherlands; still more like Gideon Schaats wanted to leave but were said to be too poor to go.⁴²

Learning these facts of our history has been encouraging to me as a bivocational pastor. My pastorate rests upon a strong foundation. This mind-set would surely be beneficial to all future small church and part-time pastors in our denomination as well as to the churches they are called to serve.

Challenges For Small Churches

These churches face many challenges. Leading a small church is no small task. This is as true for the elders and deacons as it is for the pastor. There is work to be done, important work for God, but there is too often a limited amount of people and resources available to accomplish our mission. Almost everything—from volunteers to staff a nursery to paper towels for the kitchen—seems to be in short supply. Even more, seeking and choosing a candidate to serve as a part-time pastor in one of these small churches is difficult, often frustrating, and is usually done without sufficient understanding or preparation. Yet, this is without question one of the most important responsibilities these church leaders must undertake and one that if done improperly or hastily can affect the health and mission of the church for many years. I am convinced that having the “right” pastor, not whether the pastor is full-time or part-time, is the most important factor affecting the health of a small church. As Anthony Pappas has emphasized, concerning having the right pastoral leadership in small churches:

⁴² Brown, 39.

Small churches face a number of challenges as they seek to be faithful in the twenty-first century. They also have a needed message of faithfulness for the days ahead. Will small churches succeed in fulfilling God's will for them? Time will tell, of course, but it seems to me that the greatest single resource to appropriate God's tomorrow is *quality leadership*—leadership that seeks God's heart, leadership that loves the small church, leadership that understands the nature of the small church and can act appropriately within it. This type of leadership cares about the small church. It believes that each congregation is a magnificent creation of almighty God and that each congregation is called to a ministry that it alone can accomplish. It believes that each congregation, no matter how small, is a mission outpost in its time and place. And it believes that each congregation has its own wonder and beauty that, by believing in it, can be released.⁴³

This must be highlighted for pastoral search committees from the very beginning of their work and all throughout the process. Finding the right pastor for a small church involves discovering the candidate's understanding, heart and vision for the small church.

Those who are chosen to serve on the pastoral search committee need to understand what specifically to look for in a pastor for their particular church and setting, especially those searching for a part-time pastor. A high level of commitment and of competence is required. Yet Robert Spradling and Warren Wiersbe, in their book, *The Lost Shepherd: Finding and Keeping the Right Pastor*, observe that members of pastoral search committees are too often selected to be representative rather than competent.⁴⁴ Attention is usually paid to choosing which members and groups must be asked to serve so they will not be offended, rather than on whether or not these members will put the interests of the congregation as a whole ahead of their own

⁴³ Pappas, Anthony G. *Entering the World of the Small Church* (Bethesda, MD.: Alban Institute), 2000, 9.

⁴⁴ Robert K. Spradling and Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Lost Shepherd: Finding and Keeping the Right Shepherd* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 2008), 12.

agendas. In small churches, it is not unusual that the current leadership board, or even just one of their more powerful leaders, will take it upon themselves to fill the vacancy.⁴⁵ Although I am not suggesting that this is a common practice, what it does indicate is the degree to which many of our small churches function without proper guidance and support from higher governing bodies. The fact that this goes on, and that we know that it goes on without the classis intervening, indicates either an unfortunate lack of oversight or, even more disappointing, a complete lack of willingness to get involved in the struggles or politics of our small congregations.

Still, whatever the case may be, the church leaders who take up this important duty to serve on a pastoral search committee are typically unaware of both the challenges and opportunities of having a part-time pastor serving and leading the church or of the distinctive needs and issues that must be addressed in the life of their part-time pastor in order to enjoy a fruitful ministry with them. As someone has once said, “Small churches are not ‘little’ big churches.”⁴⁶ I agree with Lyle Schaller who insists that “the best of our small congregations are not simply miniature versions of larger churches. They are different orders of God’s creation.”⁴⁷ In fact, effective pastoral leadership in a small church “requires a different set of gifts, skills, priorities

⁴⁵ I once received a phone call from an elder of a church where I had provided some pulpit supply offering me the position, right then and there—no pastoral search committee was convened, no church profile was completed, and no interview was conducted. I later learned that he used a similar approach in calling a previous pastor.

⁴⁶ Contemporary proverb, source unknown.

⁴⁷ Schaller, 135.

and personal characteristics than are required to be the effective senior pastor of a larger congregation.”⁴⁸

Even the pastors who have answered the call to a part-time ministry in a local church may have no idea what leading a small church is like and what are, in fact, the real issues and rewards of pursuing this unique form of ministry.⁴⁹ I certainly did not, even though I confidently thought I did; after all, I was raised in a small church, was an adult member of a small church, and was friends with several small church pastors and had many conversations with them before I accepted the call. But I never lead a small church before. I never was the “pastor” of a small church before. Even more, I never was a “part-time” pastor of a small church before. A great deal of guidance was needed, for me and for the church alike, but it was difficult to find—and often inadequate when found. This is the problem this project has sought to address.

Current Resources For Small Churches

My denomination, the Reformed Church in America, does provide a “manual” for search committees, but this resource is intended only as a procedure manual for

⁴⁸ Schaller, 14.

⁴⁹ See: Dennis Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), especially chapter 2, “A Good Match” 19-25, and chapter 4, “Leadership in the Church” 43-56. For additional useful works on this topic, see also: Steve R. Bierly, *How to Thrive as a Small Church Pastor: A Guide to Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998); Glenn C. Daman, *Leading the Small Church: How to Develop a Transformational Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006); Anthony Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*; Anthony G. Pappas, ed. *Inside the Small Church* (Baltimore, MD: Alban Institute, 2002). Some of these works will be further discussed in Chapter 3. For an exceptional discussion of pastoring in different size churches, see: Roy M. Oswald “How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate Sized Churches” in Beth Ann Gaede, ed. *Size Transitions in Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Alban Institute, 2001), 31-46.

accomplishing administrative tasks like setting up a search committee, creating a church profile, interviewing a candidate, and the like; it is not intended to address specific church needs, especially of smaller churches.⁵⁰ Even more, the writers of this manual—like the writers of most of our denominational resources—seem to assume a larger church size in the way they suggest the search committee should be set up, how a church study should be conducted, and even the number of members and groups that should be represented on the committee. Although these resources are valuable and helpful tools that should be utilized by all our churches of every size, they were never intended to address the distinct needs of a small church seeking to call a bivocational pastor and these resources need to be supplemented by less general and more particular guides.

In addition to the search committee manual, each classis does provide a supervisor for churches who do not have a pastor in order to help them govern the church in the absence of pastoral leadership. The supervisor also offers guidance and leadership to the search committees.⁵¹ These supervisors are almost always full-time pastors of the larger churches in the classis. Perhaps, as a result, small church leaders often report that these supervisors primarily focus on finding a suitable number of candidates to be interviewed and on completing the entire process in a manner as pleasant and as expeditious as possible; unfortunately, the supervisors seldom offer any insight into what the church should look for in a part-time pastor for a small church.

⁵⁰ Reformed Church in America, *Pastoral Search Handbook* (New York: 2004). See also: Christian Reformed Church in North America, *More Than a Search Committee* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2012).

⁵¹ Reformed Church in America, *Book of Church Order* (2012), 34.

This was the majority finding in face-to-face guided interviews conducted by this author with fifteen church leaders in the Reformed Church in America, with confidential reporting by mutual agreement, conducted between May 2013 and August 2013, including five interviews with local church leaders who were currently serving on a search committee or who had previously served on a search committee to call a part-time pastor for their church.⁵² I suspect, like David L. Gilbert, that this may contribute to the high rate of pastoral turnover, particularly in smaller churches. Gilbert states:

Herein lies a major problem contributing to musical pulpits. Few committees have knowledge of criteria or a process to guide them. It is the absence of established criteria to evaluate candidates, and a recognized process to guide the search committee, which poses a significant threat to the congregation. When a search committee does not acquire needed criteria from which the congregation and candidates can clearly identify mutual areas of compatibility and incompatibility, it is improbable that a fruitful, long-lasting ministry partnership will be enjoyed.⁵³

In my own experience, here is where a great problem lies in the supervision of our smaller churches in the Reformed Church in America. At times, our supervisors do not insist that the congregations they supervise complete a church self-study or even prepare a church profile for the benefit of either themselves or the potential candidates. “Any local church trying to identify what it is seeking in a new pastor,” asserts Robert LaRochelle, “must first be able to articulate for its search committee how it envisions itself as a small church.”⁵⁴ I couldn’t agree more.

⁵² For a list of the questions used in the guided interviews, see Appendix A, page 139.

⁵³ David L. Gilbert, *The Candidate Evaluation Process: An Investigation of Pastoral Search Committees in Their Search, Evaluation, and Selection of a Pastoral Candidate* (Directed Research Project, Lancaster Bible College, 2000), 4.

⁵⁴ LaRochelle, 61.

In addition, as the interviews revealed, the supervisors—along with the local church leaders—frequently did not seem to understand the culture, values, priorities, or leadership dynamics of a small church. This is an important critique not a cheeky complaint. The local church leaders all reported that they liked their classis assigned supervisor, they believed their supervisor was devoted to helping them, and that they had a good relationship and positive experience with their supervisor. However, the actual level of practical help received by our smaller churches from their supervisors appears to be minimal; this finding is consistent with the majority of churches seeking a pastor, regardless of the size or theological tradition, who report accomplishing their task of finding a pastor in virtually an autonomous manner, even with an appointed denominational representative.⁵⁵ This being said, more assistance is clearly required, especially in helping small churches—and their supervisors along with them—make wise, informed decisions in the calling of a part-time pastor. Without this added assistance, most of our churches will likely choose a pastor based upon a more basic “cost and availability” criteria instead of on which pastor is the right fit for their church, tradition, or mission.⁵⁶

In my interviews with local church leaders, with part-time pastors, and with denominational leaders, every person I spoke with identified the search committee manual and the supervisor as resources for churches calling a part-time pastor. There is

⁵⁵ Robert W. Dingman, *In Search of a Leader: The Complete Search Committee Guidebook* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1989), 7.

⁵⁶ Adair T. Lummis, *What Do Lay People Want in a Pastor? Answers from Lay Search Committee Chairs and Regional Judicatory Leaders* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2003), 5.

a third common resource, the pastor's profile form, that was mentioned by all the part-time pastors and all the denominational leaders, but only mentioned by one local church leader, and not in a complementary way.⁵⁷ The pastors profile form is a series of demographic data about a candidate such as the person's name, education, and ministry experience; a group of short essays that the candidate completes on various topics such as their style of ministry, their passion in ministry, and their strengths in ministry; and a list of references. What the local church leader objected to, along with most of the denominational leaders and part-time pastors, can be summed up with a short quote from one of the denominational leaders: "It doesn't give the churches what they want. It asks questions that the churches don't care about and leaves out what the churches do care about."⁵⁸ Two specific examples were almost always repeated by those I met with. The first was a short essay asking the candidate to "provide a theological reflection on a current cultural topic" and the second was the omission of the candidate's age, marital status, and size of family living at home (this second example was formerly provided on the pastor's profile but was removed on the most recently revised version).

Many of these pastor profiles do not reach the search committees of smaller churches. There are two primary reasons. Pastor profiles are sent to churches seeking pastors from our denominational office only when a church submits a church profile of their own; if they have neglected or refused to complete a church profile they are out of

⁵⁷ Local church leader #3, interview by author, June 13, 2013.

⁵⁸ Denominational leader #2, interview by author, May 26, 2013.

the loop, so to speak. In addition, many matches between pastors and churches in the Reformed Church in America are made by networking and through “word-of-mouth.” A pastor’s profile may be only written for a particular church, or given to only a handful of trusted colleagues to pass on to potential churches, rather than being circulated around in the “official” channels. This has always been my personal practice as well; I haven’t had a pastor profile on file or in general circulation—ever. And many of my colleagues in ministry in my denomination do the same. This does not make it easy for our churches, certainly not our smaller churches, who may not get the attention they deserve in this present popular yet “unofficial” system.

The Larger Problem Facing Small Churches

These churches often feel overlooked by the denomination or inferior to our larger churches. In fact, David R. Ray insists: “The largest problem facing smaller churches is not the shortage of people or money. Instead, their most dominating and debilitating problem is more often low morale, resulting in negative self-esteem.”⁵⁹ All local church leaders I interviewed stated that having a part-time pastor, instead of a full-time pastor, contributed to this negative self-image. Others prominent contributing factors include decreasing numbers in worship and a lack of children in worship or Sunday School. This is consistent with what Brandon J. O’Brien has described in *The Strategically Small Church*: “The single greatest problem with small churches is perception. Low attendance, small budgets, and limited staff are not, in and of

⁵⁹ Ray, 191.

themselves, problematic. What is problematic are the insecurities and defensiveness that result when we fail to live up to expectations of success established by a handful of [larger] churches.⁶⁰

This negative perception will make it difficult to call or to keep a pastor in a small church. Church leaders, search committees, and their supervisors may all need to change their mind-set in order to offer a healthy and fruitful ministry for those churches.

Even pastors who accept a call to a part-time ministry and begin serving in this setting quite often face a similar issue. As Dennis W. Bickers has said, offering counsel to part-time pastors:

Do not be surprised if at times others make you feel—intentionally or not—like a second class citizen in the kingdom of God. They will wonder why you can't cut it in the real church world, and their attitudes may even affect the way you view yourself and your calling. You must not seek validation for what you are doing from other people. Only you know what God has called you to do. This sense of calling is the key to the bivocational minister overcoming the negative perceptions some have of our ministry...Regardless of its size, your church is made up of people for whom Christ died. They need a shepherd who will minister to their needs and lead them in the paths God has laid out.⁶¹

This was true to my experience. There were times when I definitely was made to feel by others like a second class citizen in the kingdom of God. There were also times that I made myself feel low because of the way I was thinking about myself and my church. Not only that, there were times that I believed I was pastoring a congregation of people who were convinced that they were sub-standard in the kingdom of God—in

⁶⁰ Brandon J. O'Brien, *The Strategically Small Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 36.

⁶¹ Bickers, *The Work*, 57-58.

the eyes of others, and in the eyes of God—because of their smaller size, limited resources, and lack of sustained growth for many years.

This experience was also relayed by three of the part-time pastors I interviewed. Yet, all remained in their ministry setting, were able to find peace and joy in their ministry, and continue to have a healthy and fruitful ministry there today. They accomplished this by intentionally focusing on their call from God to ministry and to pastor the exact small church they were serving.⁶² In fact, two of the pastors began in their church setting as full-time pastors and chose to remain, even after their congregations could no longer fully fund their ministry, seeking additional income outside the church. They chose to remain not only because of their great affection for and devotion to their congregations but, even more, they remained because they believed God called them to a part-time ministry to that congregation.

The Content and Purpose of This Work

In light of the challenges that confront small churches in calling a part-time pastor as presented above, my thesis project is directed toward developing a guidebook to be used by church leaders in the Reformed Church in America to assist these churches in this important task. The guidebook will offer guidance to local church leaders, search committee members, church supervisors, and the denominational staff who have direct role, or interest in, the ministry of our local church search committees.

⁶² See: Bickers, *The Work*, 6. Bickers states, "Perhaps the most crucial factor necessary for successful bivocational ministry is that both the church and the minister know they have been called to this ministry."

Additionally, the guidebook is intended to be of value to bivocational pastors and those considering a call to this unique pastoral setting by highlighting the calling, role and biblical responsibilities of all members of a local church who are served by a part-time minister, including the church's part-time pastor.

This thesis project, therefore, will include the following content. Chapter Two will discuss the theological and biblical themes foundational to this topic. Attention will be paid to four essential and related themes: 1) The calling of the part-time pastor, 2) The calling of a church, 3) The calling of a Christian, and 4) The work of a part-time pastor. Chapter Three will explore the relevant literature reviewed to identify and address the major challenges and opportunities, the drawbacks and benefits, of calling a bivocational pastor. This included a focus on the church as well the pastor. Chapter Four presents the project design and an outline for the draft of the guide book which, completed, will be included in an appendix to this work. Chapter Five presents the outcomes from the critical reviews solicited from church leaders on the completed draft of the guidebook, including a discussion of changes and additions that should be made, as well as suggestions for further study.

My prayer is that this work will be used by the Lord to provide small churches and part-time pastors with a resource that will assist them in enjoying a healthy and fruitful ministry together for many years to come.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In his book, *The Work of the Bivocational Pastor*, Dennis Bickers tells about a conversation he overheard while in a Christian bookstore between two recent seminary graduates, one of whom worked in the store. They were discussing their ongoing search for a church to serve in as new pastors and were expressing their frustrations in what calls were being offered to them. One of them stated that the only calls he was receiving came from a few small churches out in the country. He then declared, quite dismissively, that “he wasn’t wasting his time with those churches.”¹

Attitudes like this toward small churches—and to the pastors who serve in them—are not uncommon. Neither are they confined to recent seminary graduates. Many people, clergy and laity alike, have a notion that smaller churches are inferior to larger churches; are less healthy and more difficult to lead than more substantial churches; and that they have failed, or are failing, to provide for the spiritual needs of their members and community. As David Ray has stated, “To many, small means failure, inadequacy, immaturity, or a stage that precedes legitimacy.”² Unfortunately, these views are often held by the smaller churches about themselves.³ In the same way, many

¹ Dennis W. Bickers, *The Work of a Bivocational Pastor* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 4.

² David R. Ray, *The Indispensable Guide For Smaller Churches* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), x.

³ Bickers, *The Work*, 5. “Many small churches have serious struggles with self-esteem issues.”

people also have a low view of the pastors who serve in these smaller churches; sometimes, those who hold this low view includes the pastors themselves.⁴

This perception is not always consistent with the truth. There are many small churches that are healthy and thriving. And there are many pastors serving in these churches that are gratified and grateful for their unique calling and are producing good fruit for the kingdom of God, fruit that will last. Together with their congregations they are models of Christian faith and ministry.

This being said, it is true that, at times, many small churches are not healthy, thriving churches. But as I will insist, it is not simply the consequence of being small. Their size may have nothing to do with their health. One cannot determine a church's fruitfulness in the kingdom of God by the number of people who fill the pews on Sunday mornings, large or small. There are many factors that can lead to a church's plateau or decline in size: everything from a local factory closing and change in population to church conflict and poor leadership. Likewise, it is also true not every pastor who serves in a small church is a competent or effective pastor. Even more, not every pastor is called to be a small church pastor, or is equipped to thrive in a small church, or understands the challenges of leading a small church, or appreciates the beauty and attributes of small church life and ministry, particularly as a bivocational pastor.

In order to have such a fruitful and gratifying bivocational pastorate in a small church, both the pastor and the congregation must ground their shared ministry upon three essential foundations, all directly related to a theology of our "calling" from God.

⁴ Steven R. Bierly, *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 38-41.

This chapter will first explore “the calling of a part-time pastor.” The primary question to be addressed is this: Is a person called to be a part-time pastor, or is the only legitimate calling to a full-time pastorate? I agree with Dennis Bickers who states, “Perhaps the most critical factor necessary for successful bivocational ministry is that both the church and the minister know they have been called to this ministry.”⁵ This section will also include a discussion concerning the work of the bivocational pastor outside the church and its relationship to the pastor’s calling within the church.

The second essential theological issue to explore is “the calling of the church.” What is the church called to be? What is the church called to do? What is her identity, her mission? What part does the pastor play in this calling? What part does the entire congregation play?

Directly related to these other callings, the third theological foundation to be discussed is “the calling of the church member.” What are they called to be and do? How is their calling related to that of the pastor, other leaders, and the local church as a whole? Here is where we will also consider the work of elders and deacons as a calling in the Reformed tradition and their function in the church. This will, of course, be an overall exploration of what is often called the “priesthood of all believers.”

The work of the part-time pastor will then be explored, only after we clarify the various roles and responsibilities that emerge from the callings of Christians receive from God, since many of the difficulties that bivocational pastors and their churches are having are due, in large part, to a misunderstanding their distinctive “calling” from God.

⁵ Bickers, *The Work*, 6.

The following, therefore, is intended to clarify our theology, strengthen our ministry, and encourage our people—pastors and churches alike—for service in His kingdom.

The Calling of a Part-Time Pastor

Any discussion regarding the validity of a call to part-time ministry must begin with the recognition that there is no directive in the Bible ordaining any clergy to a paid, full-time ministry; in fact, as Os Guinness has stated, “there is not a single instance in the New Testament of God’s special call to anyone into a paid occupation or into the role of a religious professional.”⁶ This was certainly true in the early Christian community. The apostles of Jesus were commanded by our Lord to preach and serve, yet they were commanded to do so without pay. “You received without paying; give without pay” (Mt 10:8).⁷ This does not mean, however, they were prohibited from accepting food or provision (Mt 10:10). What is being stipulated is the basic principle that the disciples were not to “profit” from the gospel; they were, however, permitted to have their basic needs provided for from among those whom they served, ultimately trusting that their “living” would come from the Lord who sent them.⁸

This practice was also evident in the Jewish community at the time of Jesus. There was a long tradition of the rabbis not being allowed to accept a wage for their

⁶ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 49.

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001)

⁸ Donald A. Hager, *Matthew 1-13: Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 272.

religious or legal services along with a clear expectation that they would support themselves with a trade; those who asked for money were treated with suspicion and the authenticity of their calling deemed suspect.⁹ The apostle Paul seemed to be influenced, at least in part, by this tradition. His ministry in Thessalonica was explicitly stated—or perhaps defended—to be motivated entirely by a call to preach the gospel among them, without “a pretext for greed” (1 Thes 2:5). Instead, Paul and his companions labored among them “night and day,” as he stated, “that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (1 Thes 2:9). As he did in other locations of his ministry, Paul worked as a “tentmaker” while he also served the Lord and His people in the gospel ministry (2 Thes 3:7-8, Acts 13:3).¹⁰

This does not mean that the apostle Paul never received any form of financial assistance from the churches he served. While in Thessalonica, Paul received aid from the church in Philippi (Phil 4:16). He also told the believers in Corinth that he preached the gospel among them “free of charge” because he accepted financial support from other churches (2 Cor 11:8-9). This being said, it is unlikely that Paul ever accepted funds directly from a church that he was currently serving in, as he did from some of the churches where he previously had served.

However, Paul did not prohibit this practice. In fact, just the opposite is the case. In his instruction for the church to Timothy, Paul declares, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and

⁹ Dorr, 7-8.

¹⁰ Due to the example of the apostle Paul, the term “tent-making” ministry is also used to describe bivocational or part-time ministry.

teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages’” (1 Tm 5:17-18). Both of these examples in quotations by Paul come from agricultural life and signify the same principle: What is right and fair on the farm is also right and fair in the Lord’s harvest field; in other words, all who labor in the fields of the Lord deserve to make a living from their work.¹¹

It should be noted that the second quote from the apostle Paul is a statement from the Lord Jesus himself. In Luke 10:2-7, as Jesus sends out his disciples, he declares:

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace be to this house!” And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.

Evidently, Jesus did not object to his followers being cared for by those they served. He actually commands his followers to anticipate and accept the “wages” for their labor on behalf of others. This appears to be our Savior’s desired pattern of service—each one caring for the other in mutual service.

The apostle Paul follows the Lord in this desired pattern of service for others. “One who is taught the word,” he states in Galatians 6:6, “must share all good things with the one who teaches.” He even considers this a command of Christ, as we read in 2 Corinthians 9:13-14: “Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share what is offered at the altar? In

¹¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 224-225.

the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”

This being established—that is, it is biblically appropriate to occupy a paid position as a pastor of a church—we need to ask if the Scriptures provide any word on the amount of time a pastor must labor for the church in order to be deemed truly called by God, or considered by the church, a legitimate pastor. In other words, can a person be called to be a “part-time” pastor?¹²

We have already seen that the apostle Paul served as a tent-maker. He is considered by many to be the model or standard of bivocational ministry. Luther M. Dorr goes so far as to call Paul the “Father of Bivocationalism.”¹³ And yet, although Paul served as a tent-maker while engaged in gospel ministry, is it appropriate to say that he only served the Lord or his people “part-time”? This is really getting to the heart of the matter. Can a person today be a “tent-maker”—or a nurse, mechanic, or bus driver—and be called to ministry to serve as a pastor at the same time? Few would object to calling pastoral ministry a vocation.¹⁴ Is “tent-making” also a vocation? Can a person have more than one vocation, more than one calling from God?¹⁵

¹² John F. Brug, “Doctrinal Brief: Part-Time Pastors,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 105, no.3 (Summer 2008), 211. Brug argues, “The public ministry is a means of livelihood for full time service.” He insists that paid, full-time ministry should be the “ideal and the norm” of pastoral ministry, although he does allow for limited “exceptions” for smaller congregations, 212-214. I will not be arguing that part-time ministry should be the ideal and the norm, but that part-time ministry is just as biblically legitimate as full-time ministry.

¹³ Dorr, 7.

¹⁴ Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2004), 17. Prime and Begg insist that pastoral ministry is a vocation: “The ministry of undershepherds and teachers is not simply a job. Rather it is a vocation, the answering of a specific call from God.”

One thing is absolutely clear in the Word of God—all Christians are called to full-time ministry. All Christians are called to bear fruit as disciples of Jesus Christ (Jn 15:5-8). Jesus insists, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” (15:16). This is the case of every believer regardless of what their work is. If you are a believer—and if you work as a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker—you are “called” into full-time Christian ministry. This includes the part-time pastor, because this call to full-time ministry encompasses his or her whole life, wherever they are and whatever they are doing.

This is so, because the “calling” to pastoral ministry is not the full extent of the call a pastor receives. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us that one of the Bible’s most frequent one-word description of every Christian is that we are “called.”¹⁶ We are called out of sin and death and called into fellowship with God.¹⁷ By God’s grace, this includes a call into relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, a call to a new way of life in Christ involving our character and conduct, and a call to Christian service which God has prepared especially for us (Eph 2:8-10).¹⁸ The manner we carry out our calling will be unique to our gifts, passions, professions, locations and even our personalities, but we share the same experience of being “called” by God.

¹⁵ The word vocation means “to be called.” See: *Webster’s II New College Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 1237.

¹⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989), 33.

¹⁷ Dave Harvey, *Am I Called? The Summons to Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 37.

¹⁸ Prime and Begg, 19-20. I am indebted to these pastors for this three-fold understanding of God’s call, which I will build upon below.

This must be kept in mind as we explore the call to part-time pastoral ministry. As a believer, a “part-time” pastor is already called to “full-time” ministry.¹⁹ Even when a part-time pastor is working as a bus driver on weekday mornings or as a foreman in a factory on the night shift, they remain surely in full-time ministry. “Whatever you do, in word and deed,” we are commanded, “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17; cf. 1 Cor 10:31). God’s call engages a person’s whole being in service to the Lord.²⁰ Our whole being means: who we are and what we do; all our time and all our life. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39). This calling, as Os Guinness defines it, “is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.”²¹ Simply stated, we are called to be Christians, first and foremost. This is our primary call, or vocation, from which every other “calling” we receive is derived and depends.

The call to ministry, then, is not the first call a pastor receives.²² As Os Guinness asserts, “We are not primarily called to do something or go somewhere; we are called

¹⁹ Harvey, 47.

²⁰ Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1964), 10.

²¹ Guinness, 4.

²² Prime and Begg, 19.

to Someone. We are not called first to a special work but to God.”²³ This is the “effectual call” that makes one a believer in the first instance—a person who knows and has been saved by God—and who is now “called” a child of God.²⁴ This is what I refer to as our *calling to salvation*.

What follows this call to God is a call to live *like* God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). “Be imitators of God,” Paul explains, “as beloved children” (5:1).²⁵ “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pt 1:15-16). All the moral instruction in the Scriptures reveal what this looks like in a believers life, but the true portrait of the Christian life is found most fully in Jesus Christ, not simply in his teaching, but in his own life—given for us that we might have life.²⁶ We are called to live through Jesus (Gal 2:20), by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Gal 5:25), that we would be holy and blameless before God (Eph 1:4), maturing into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29). One can say that our primary vocation to be a Christian also contains a calling is to be *like* Christ. This is our second calling, what I refer to as our *calling to sanctification*.

²³ Guinness, 42.

²⁴ Ferguson, 33.

²⁵ This call to live in holiness as a child of God has a direct bearing on the character and work of the pastor, as we will see below.

²⁶ Ryle, John Charles, *Holiness* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 1979), 34. For a fuller discussion concerning holiness, see the entire chapters on “Sanctification” and “Holiness,” 15-49. Also: Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1996); J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009); and more recently, Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap Between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

Only after we understand these callings can we then appreciate the next calling, the calling to ministry, which is bound to and flows from the previous ones. In my mind, they form the “trinity” of our Christian vocation; there is not one without the others. As Edmund Clowney has said, “There is no call to the ministry that is not first a call to Christ.”²⁷ It is only in the context of our relationship with Christ—who He is, what He has done for us, and what He produces in us—can we ever hope to grow in our calling to holiness or carry out our calling to ministry. For even as we are called *to* God, and called to be *like* God, we are also called *for* God. This is our third calling, which I refer to as our *calling to service*.

As you can see, our call to God can be viewed as “a metaphor for the life of faith itself” and demonstrates a holistic quality.²⁸ The callings to salvation, sanctification, and service are simply three aspects of our Christian vocation. It is appropriate to talk of three distinct “callings” as part of a single call to Christian vocation because these three callings are often heard at different times in a believer’s life. As we mature in the life of faith, as we receive and apply the Word and Sacraments to our lives, as we participate in the worship and fellowship and mission of the church, our own calling to sanctification and our own calling to service will be heard along with our calling to salvation.

Since, then, all Christians are called to a life of service, a life *for* God, a life of full-time ministry—as an aspect of our Christian vocation—what form of work or activities should this be? In other words, are only full-time pastors properly living out their

²⁷ Clowney, *Called to the Ministry*, 5.

²⁸ Guinness, 31.

Christian vocation? Certainly, it must be said, that full-time pastors are fulfilling a calling to service as an aspect of their Christian vocation. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, two long-time pastors, define the calling to pastoral ministry as “the unmistakable conviction an individual possesses that God wants him to do a specific task.”²⁹ I wholeheartedly agree. But this statement also suggests an essential question: How much of a person’s life is to be occupied with that specific task? In other words, if we agree to the specifics of the “specific” task—pastoral ministry—does that leave room for anything else?

This is a question about the whole life of a Christian pastor. It involves not only the role and duties one carries out as a pastor of a church—preaching and teaching, as so forth—but also includes everything else a pastor does and everyone else a pastor sees, whether it is in the church, in the home, in the grocery store, out on the golf course, or out on the street. All of these are places and people to be touched by a pastor’s ministry, for all of these belong to God (Ps 24:1).³⁰

This means that there is never a time that a pastor is not “the pastor” of the local church. Many hours a week may be spent within the walls of the church building, or in the homes of church families, or in the hospital with church members and friends, but there are other hours that occupy a pastor’s week that are “outside” the church. In either case, one does not stop being “the pastor” of the church. This is true for full-time pastors and for part-time pastors. As a part-time pastor, I remain “the pastor” when I

²⁹ Prime and Begg, 18.

³⁰ See: Gregory P. Elder, “The Challenge of Part-time Ministry,” *Christian Ministry* 18, no. 2 (March 1987): 29. “The Bible makes no sharp, Platonic division between ‘spiritual’ and ‘temporal’ works,” insists Elder, “both are ministries.”

am having dinner with my family, when I am sitting in the service station waiting for my car's oil to be changed, and even when I am on a two-week vacation in Maine. This is how I think of myself. And more importantly, this is how my congregation thinks of me. There is never a time when I am not "their" pastor. This is so even when I am working as a nurse, what many of them call my "other job."

The truth is: pastoral ministry is never a part-time calling. As Dennis Bickers has stated about the duties of his own bivocational ministry:

I had the same number of sermons to prepare each year as the pastors of much larger churches. (In fact, I may have had more sermons to prepare because I didn't have people on staff to preach for me.) My members went into the hospital and expected pastoral visits. Church members and others in the community called upon me to conduct their weddings and officiate at their funerals. Like many pastors, I was on call 24/7, and I was excited to be involved in the lives of our congregation.³¹

As one can see, there is no difference in the calling of a part-time pastor compared to a full-time pastor. In fact, the only real distinction—which does not change the nature of the calling itself—is the actual number of hours per week that one is contracted to perform the duties of a pastor within the church. In any event, we remain in full-time ministry no matter where we are, what we are doing, or who we are with.

This is a pastor's response to the call on his or her life by God. It is one aspect of our Christian vocation. And it is just as personal and just as sacred as a Christian answering a call by God to be a nurse, a mechanic, a teacher, or a mother. As Martin Luther has said, "The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do

³¹ Bickers, *The Work*, 3. This is the reason he gives for preferring the term "fully funded" minister to describe what is traditionally called a full-time minister. According to Bickers, part-time and bivocational pastors are also in full-time ministry but their income is supplemented from a source outside the church.

not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.”³² This being said, a person can truly be called by God to be a nurse or a pastor, a farmer or a pastor, a mother or a pastor—or even both—in our calling to His service. The essential trait of every Christian’s ministry is simply this: “Whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17).

The Calling of a Church

A calling to pastoral ministry, full-time or part-time, is a calling to serve within a local church. In fact, as Dave Harvey has insisted, a calling to pastoral ministry does not exist without a local church and only finds its expression within a local church.³³ For this reason, determining what a pastor’s ministry looks like, what specific duties define a pastor’s role in the church, must be understood in relation to the mission of the church.

That the local church has a calling by God is clear from Scripture. The primary word to designate the people of God in the Old Testament is *qahal* derived from the root word *qal*, meaning “to call.” In the New Testament, the established word is *ekklesia*, meaning “to call out.”³⁴ Jesus was the first to use the word *ekklesia* to refer to the church, applying it to the company of people gathered around him who publically

³² Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (n.p.: FigBooks, 2012), 3.42, Kindle.

³³ Harvey, 26.

³⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA:Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 556

confessed that Jesus is Lord (Mat16:18).³⁵ This is the primary call of the church, as the *Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America* plainly declares: “The church, which Scripture represents with many images, is a gathering of persons chosen in Christ through the Holy Spirit to profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”³⁶ The church is called by God *to* Christ. Edmund Clowney calls this the *Great Constitution* of the church, directly relating it to the mission of the church to “make disciples” in the *Great Commission*, by clearly defining what this means for us: gathering together a people who profess in word and deed that Jesus is our Lord and Savior.³⁷

The many images that Scripture uses to represent the church give a rich and hopeful picture of what a church of these professing Christians is called to be—the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23; Col 1:18), the bride of Christ (Rv 21:2, 9), the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21), and so forth³⁸—but they all to various degrees stress our vital relationship to the person and work of Christ. This is so, because the church belongs to Jesus. Christ founded the church and gave us our identity (Mt 16:18), he paid for us with his blood (Acts 20:28), and personally identifies himself with his church (Acts 9:4). He is the true “Head” of the church: our life and

³⁵ Berkhof, 556.

³⁶ *Book of Church Order*, 2.

³⁷ Edmund J. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 160.

³⁸ Paul Minear lists ninety-six images of the church. See: Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960).

ministry flow from him alone (Eph 1:22; Col 1:18); as such, he has full authority over the work of the church.³⁹ He alone has the right to establish the mission of the church.

This is extremely important in any discussion about the mission of the church—the work we in a local church are called to do by Christ. There are many competing voices, both within and outside the church, insisting that the church must get involved in any number of good causes (homelessness), community services (food pantry), and global needs (human trafficking). In other words, there are many people with many ideas about what the church should be doing. In response to this confusion, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert offer a helpful path forward in *What Is the Mission of the Church?*:

At its most basic, the term *mission* implies two things to most people: (1) being sent and (2) being given a task. The first point makes sense because *mission* comes from a Latin word (*mittere*) meaning “to send.” The second point is implied in the first. When sent on a mission, we are sent to *do something*—and not *everything*, either, but rather we are given a particular assignment.... Even in the world around us, everyone understands that a mission is that primary thing you set out to accomplish.⁴⁰

DeYoung and Gilbert make a much needed distinction between the essential mission of the church and the various other “good” works we may do as individual Christians.

“Mission is not everything we do in Jesus’ name, nor everything we do in obedience to Christ. Mission is the task we were given to fulfill. It is what Jesus sent us into the world

³⁹ *Book of Church Order*, 2.

⁴⁰ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 19.

to do.”⁴¹ Even more, they insist that the mission given to the church as a whole is much narrower and more focused than what is expected of individual Christians.⁴²

Smaller churches need to understand this distinction. So do part-time pastors. We as a church are not commanded to do every good work that is needed in our world, or is asked of us by others, or even commanded by Christ. The church and the Christian have different work to do, although they support and complement each other. As individual Christians, we may set out in ministry in any number of ways and settings—according to our own personal calling to service—but as a local church, our calling is more precise. And as we will see, when the local church fulfills its own calling, then we as individual Christians are greatly built up and better equipped to accomplish the good works we believe Jesus calls each of us to pursue as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This is so, because “making disciples” who profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior is at the heart of what the church is called to do by Christ; it is our unique and central calling.⁴³ Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20). The single command of this passage is the imperative *make disciples* and serves as the central and defining imperative of this verse; the three dependent participles—*go*,

⁴¹ DeYoung and Gilbert, 29.

⁴² DeYoung and Gilbert, 233.

⁴³ DeYoung and Gilbert, 26.

baptizing, and *teaching*—simply describe various aspects of this ongoing process of making disciples.⁴⁴ This ongoing process includes an intention action (*go*) of helping people make a public profession of faith and joining the church (*baptizing*) and nurturing them in the path of following Jesus as his disciples (*teaching*).⁴⁵ This is our *Great Commission*, commonly recognized as a foundational passage for determining the mission of the church.⁴⁶ Stephen Smallman reminds us that this is a work that Jesus, himself, accomplishes through us. “When we consider that Jesus began with a statement of his authority and ended it with an absolute promise of his ongoing presence as this great work is undertaken,” he writes, “we can properly conclude that making disciples of the nations is a work that Jesus himself is doing through his church.”⁴⁷

Another passage often set alongside this one to define the mission of the church is Matthew 22:37-40, often called the *Great Commandment*, where Jesus summarizes the will of God for all his people.⁴⁸ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

⁴⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 951.

⁴⁵ Stephen Smallman, *What Is Discipleship?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 7.

⁴⁶ For the importance of the Great Commission to our understanding of the mission of the church, see: DeYoung and Gilbert, 40-46.

⁴⁷ Smallman, 7.

⁴⁸ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 102-103.

Rick Warren combines the Great Commission and the Great Commandment to formulate what he calls the five purposes of the church: worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and teaching.⁴⁹ Although the words to describe these five “purposes” may differ from one author to another, and the number of “purposes” serving the mission of the church may be slightly higher or lower from one author to another, all five typically appear in some form or another in any discussion that defines the various aspects of our mission to “make disciples.” For example, Mark Dever states, “the proper ends of the church are the worship of God, the edification of the church, and the evangelization of the world.”⁵⁰ Yet, in describing the specific details of these three proper ends, Dever includes the need for “fellowship” in his description of edification even as he offers a discussion of “missions” right after his section on evangelism.”⁵¹

John Stott also offers the same “purposes” of the church’s mission in his discussion of the early church, drawn from Acts 2:42-47. In *The Living Church*, he outlines the mission of the church by emphasizing four essential “characteristics” he gleans from this passage: we are called to be a learning church, a caring church, a worshipping church, and an evangelizing church.⁵² Stott uses the term “caring church”

⁴⁹ Warren, 103-107.

⁵⁰ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 69.

⁵¹ Dever, *The Church*, 74-76.

⁵² John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 22-33.

to define his understanding of fellowship while his depiction of the “evangelizing church” also includes what others call outreach or mission.⁵³

In the same way, Harry Reeder calls attention to what he calls the “dynamics” of the church’s mission by intentionally putting the gospel of Jesus Christ at the very center of all we are called to do as his church. Reeder’s “dynamics” are equivalent to Stott’s “characteristics.” They are also equivalent to Warren’s “purposes” in all but number. Reeder describes the “up-reach” of the gospel (worship), the “out-reach” of the gospel (evangelism), the “in-reach” of the gospel (enfolding), and the “down-reach” of the gospel (equipping).⁵⁴ In his words about evangelism, Reeder speaks about the various outreach ministries—including “mercy ministries”—that a local church should engage in, but insists that these activities should always include a way of sharing the gospel.⁵⁵

Drawing from this brief survey of discussions about the church’s mission to “make disciples,” it seems clear that the ongoing process of making disciples would include at least these four foundational tasks: worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism.⁵⁶ Worship would include the weekly gathering of the church to ascribe worth to God, to be nurtured in our faith through Word and Sacrament, and to offer up prayer for ourselves, our community, and our world. It would also include living a life of

⁵³ Stott, *The Living Church*, 25-26, 47-69.

⁵⁴ Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 167-188.

⁵⁵ Reeder, 177.

⁵⁶ Similar to Reeder, I prefer the term “evangelism” to describe our related tasks of evangelism and ministry, since I believe both these tasks must serve as a witness to the gospel—with the deeds of ministry always accompanied by an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

worship as the people of God all throughout the week, mindful of our communion with God. Discipleship includes all the activities of the church that develop and grow our knowledge and commitment in the Lord, enabling us to better live a life of holiness and service, maturing into the likeness of Christ. Fellowship describes the various caring ministries of the church, especially to one another in the Body of Christ. And evangelism encompasses our deliberate and intentional witness to Christ, in word and deed, as Savior and Lord. The terms we choose to use to describe these four aspects of our mission are important because they allow the church to remain focused on what is essential to our calling as a church.⁵⁷ This being said, the more important aspect of this discussion is the need for all churches to be actively engaged in these activities of our mission.

Along with these activities, in the Reformed tradition, it is common to talk about the three marks of a “true” church: the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the Sacraments, and the right conduct of Church Discipline.⁵⁸ This is an important way of identifying a church and describing a church’s tasks, to be sure, yet it can also lead one to assume that only the pastor and perhaps other church leaders are responsible for these duties, which is not the case. Every member of a local church is commissioned by the Lord to be personally engaged in the church’s mission—fulfilling

⁵⁷ Another reason I prefer the term “evangelism” is to keep this activity in the forefront of the church. With all the other activities of the church, evangelism can easily be neglected, and even forgotten, especially when we use terms like “outreach” and “ministry” which can obscure what we are trying to accomplish.

⁵⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 577-578.

their own calling to service—to which the pastor, other leaders, and every member plays an appointed and essential role.⁵⁹

The Calling of a Christian

The pastor is not the only “minister” in the church. The term “to minister” simply means “to serve.”⁶⁰ For this reason, John Stott asserts, “God calls every Christian to ministry, that is, to service, to be the servant of other people for the sake of Christ.”

⁶¹ Stated even more plainly, K. Maynard Head insists: “ministry is the work of the whole church.”⁶² As we have seen, every individual Christian has received a calling to salvation, a calling to sanctification, and a calling to *service*. This third calling, the calling to service, is received and becomes clarified within the church. Even more, this calling to service is to take place both within the church—for the sake of others in the church—and within the world, as we reach out personally and with the community of faith to impact the world for Christ.

The role of the church in our spiritual life and development cannot be overstated. John Calvin went so far as to insist that, as God is our Father, so the church is our Mother. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* he writes,

Let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, no, how necessary the

⁵⁹ An individual Christian’s calling to service includes both service in the church and service in the world, as we will see below.

⁶⁰ Lawrence O. Richards, *Encyclopedia of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 443.

⁶¹ John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 113.

⁶² K. Maynard Head, “The Call to Bivocational Ministry,” *Church Administration* 29, no. 6 (March 1987): 7.

knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in her womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Mt 22:30). For our weakness does not permit us to leave her school until we have spent our whole lives as scholars.⁶³

This is, indeed, a fitting image, since our life of faith begins through the church as we hear and respond to the gospel preserved and proclaimed by the church; as we continue to grow and gain spiritual health through the nourishment, encouragement, love, correction, and discipline we receive from the church; and as we head out in the world to live a life of holiness and service we will always need to guidance, support, and prayers of the church. It is a relationship that sustains us all our lives.

This means, of course, that every Christian has a vital role to play in Christ's church for the sake of one other. To say that we need the church to find life and growth in the Christian faith is simply to say that we need one another, since together we are the church. "Once we understand discipleship in the broader sense of helping one another live our Christian lives," Stephen Small has said, "then the absolute necessity of the church community comes to the foreground."⁶⁴ I am to look for affection and care *from* other members of the church even as I am to offer love and service *to* other members of the church. This is precisely what we hear in the Word of God. We are to "care for" one another (1 Cor 12:25), "encourage" one another (1 Thes 5:11), "admonish" one another (1 Thes 5:14), "love" one another (Jn 13:34), "pray" for one

⁶³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 674.

⁶⁴ Smallman, 21.

another (Jas 5:16), and the like. Bottom line: we are to be ministers to one another inside the church even as we serve as ministers to those outside the church.

This is what believers in the Reformed tradition, along with many others, refer to as the “priesthood of all believers.”⁶⁵ In other words, “All believers share in the special calling of being Christ’s representatives on earth. We do that in different ways. Clergy, priests and ministers do it one way. Factory workers, nurses, and lawyers do it in other ways. But we all devote our life and our life’s work to God’s service. That makes all of us priests.”⁶⁶ In 1 Peter 2:5 we hear, “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” He continues this theme in verse 9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Thus, the priesthood of all believers is an essential part of the biblical idea of the church.⁶⁷

As one can hear, this means that the mission of the church has not been entrusted solely to the hands of the ordained or “professional” Christians, as if the rest of the congregation has nothing to do but passively receive the ministry of the clergy. The meaning of the “priesthood of all believers” is that all Christians serve in ministry and that the work of the church is a shared responsibility and a mutual necessity. Every

⁶⁵ Robert De Moor, *Reformed: What It Means, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 2009), 45.

⁶⁶ De Moor, 45.

⁶⁷ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philipians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 34.

Christian holds office in the church. As Edmund Clowney has insisted, “All Christians, called to belong to Christ and equipped to serve him, hold office in his church. That office receives public recognition when a believer makes a public profession of faith and is welcomed by the church. The vows that are exchanged are an induction into an office that angels might envy: Christ’s calling to bear his name before the world.”⁶⁸

The reminder that all Christians are included in the “priesthood” of all believers serves the church as a healthy corrective, assuring us that there is no separation between the clergy and the laity in the call to ministry. We are all ministers. But Christians not only serve in the “priesthood” of believers, as the term “priest” suggests; our shared ministry goes much wider and deeper. We all serve as *prophets, priests*, and *kings* in the church as Christ’s representatives here on earth.⁶⁹ As Michael Horton states, all believers are prophets, priests, and kings in our “general office” to walk together in mutual support and accountability toward sound doctrine, faith, and good works.⁷⁰ Even the apostle Peter supports this view in 1 Peter 5:9 when he states we are to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness.” Clearly, the right preaching of the Word is not the exclusive role of the pastor but a shared ministry of us all, in one way or another. The same is true for church discipline, since discipline rightly conducted means to “disciple” one another, which is at the very heart of our shared mission. In fact, all three marks of the church—right preaching, right sacraments, right

⁶⁸ Clowney, *The Church*, 207.

⁶⁹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 882.

⁷⁰ Horton, 883.

discipline—all work together to “make disciples” and encompass our office as prophet, priest, and king since disciple-making is not only the agenda of every church, but the calling of every Christian.⁷¹

This is why, in 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul speaks about the spiritual gifts that have been given to each individual member of the church. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4-7).⁷² Peter also calls upon the church, as individual believers, to view our gifts as given for the common good. “As each has received a gift,” he says, “use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pt 4:10). What is clear in Scripture is that there are a variety of ways that Christians are called to acts of service, and that each one contributing his or her part is essential, not only to the health and mission of the individual, but also to the vitality and work of the church as a whole. Comparing the church to a physical body, the apostle Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 12,

For the body does not consist of one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body....The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’...But God so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another (14-25).

⁷¹ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 14.

⁷² The same point is made by Paul in Romans 12:3-8 and in Ephesians 4:11-16.

If this is true for any local congregation, then consider how much more it is true for a smaller congregation that may have only one pastor—or only one part-time pastor. If the church is relying on only the pastor to carry out the mission of the church then that church is seriously weak, not to mention much less effective, than when all the Christians in the congregation are actively engaged in their own ministry. Even more, as Scripture demonstrates, no one person receives all the gifts for the church. They are distributed among all the members as the Spirit sees fit. Therefore, no one person, not even the pastor, is able to carry out the work of the church all on their own. And to try to do so, without enlisting the gifts and responsibilities of others, would actually impede or even rob other church members of the essential work that God wants them to do, as ministers in the church of Christ.⁷³

However, this does not mean we all minister in the same way. There is a division of roles prescribed in the Scriptures. These roles enable us to support and care for one another in our assigned ministries. Every member and every gift is needed for the church to accomplish our mission to “make disciples” but we also need some faithful and mature leaders to teach, guide, and care for us as we go.

All Christians are ministers, but not all Christians are pastors.⁷⁴ And they are not all leaders, at least not at first.⁷⁵ They may first need a season of preparation and

⁷³ See: Dorr, 119.

⁷⁴ See: Horton, 887. “All of the people are priests...not all of the covenant people are ministers.” I prefer the term “minister” to Horton’s use of the term “priest” and the word “pastor” to his use of the word “minister.” Horton reserves the term “minister” for ministers of Word and Sacrament exclusively, which I believe diminishes the calling to “service” (or “ministry”) that every Christian receives and is the meaning of the “priesthood of all believers” in the first place.

instruction; a certain time to grow in wisdom, to increase in knowledge and humility, to gain in truth and love; and they may need several settings and opportunities to test and confirm their gifts and calling. In fact, all Christians need these things. For this they need the church. They need a church that helps them become faithful and obedient disciples themselves—in order that they can fulfill their calling to make disciples.

In the Reformed tradition, this is the role is filled by some members who are “called by God, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and elected by the church to fulfill leadership functions essential to the life and witness of the whole.”⁷⁶ This is the function not only of pastors, but of elders and deacons as well, who make up the consistory of the local church. They all share in the work of leading and governing the church. Together they ensure that the mission of the church to make disciples—through worship, discipleship, fellowship and evangelism—is carried out to the glory of God and are all mutually accountable for preserving the three marks of the church—the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the right conduct of church discipline—for the sake of all her members.

The office of elder in the Reformed Church of America is particularly responsible for the spiritual oversight of the congregation.⁷⁷ According to the *Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America*, elders are “set apart for a ministry of watchful and responsible care for all matters relating to the welfare and good order of the church.

⁷⁵ Robert White, *The Ministry of the Elder* (New York: Reformed Church Press, 1996), 4.

⁷⁶ White, 4.

⁷⁷ White, 10.

They are to study God's Word, to oversee the household of faith, to encourage spiritual growth, to maintain loving discipline, and to provide for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacrament."⁷⁸ This ministry includes oversight of all other officers in the church, including the care of the pastor; assisting the pastor with good counsel; and even assisting the pastor in the visitation of all members and inquirers.⁷⁹

The fulfilling of these vital tasks of ministry for the elders is crucial to the health and mission of every church. The elders are not a "board of directors" for the church appointed to administer policies, to manage programs, or to simply direct and evaluate the pastor in the performance of his or her duties. Instead, as fellow ministers, they are to directly and personally join with the pastor in caring for the spiritual life of the church and community.⁸⁰

This ministry of elders in the Reformed Church in America is complemented by the ministry of deacons. If pastors and elders are to be effective in their calling to service in their respective office, concentrating their time and efforts on the spiritual life and health of their church and community, then the ministry of deacons is just as necessary and significant. In the book of Acts, in order to allow the apostles to devote themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (6:4), others were appointed to a ministry of service to those in need. In this tradition, deacons in the Reformed Church in

⁷⁸ *Book of Church Order*, 12.

⁷⁹ *Book of Church Order*, 12.

⁸⁰ See Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), for a fuller description of the ministry of elders. Witmer makes a strong, biblical case for all elders sharing in the "shepherding" of the congregation along with the pastor.

America are servants, called by God, to a ministry of “mercy, service, and outreach” both within the church and out into the world.⁸¹ Deacons are especially called to lead others in the church to pursue acts and ministry of care in Jesus’ name within the community, wherever a need is identified, whether in a ministry to the hungry or homeless in the area or through various mission agencies responding to natural disasters or health crises throughout the world.⁸² Yet, even more, deacons are to share in the ministry of elders and pastors in the governing of the church, in the visitation of the sick and those in need, and in any other way that the whole consistory directs them, including a participation in leading worship.⁸³

One thing is clear: ministry is not carried out by the pastor alone. This can never be the case since there is simply too much work to do. As Robert LaRochelle insists in his book, *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church*, there is no such thing as “part-time” church even as there is no such thing as a “part-time” pastor. “The community of the church,” he rightly says, “is a full-time reality.”⁸⁴ This being the case, all the members of the church, under the care and leadership of the elders and deacons—each fulfilling their own calling—is absolutely essential for a church to be fruitful in her mission and for every individual Christian to be growing in faith and productive in service. In this the

⁸¹ Betty Voskuil, *The Ministry of the Deacon* (New York: Reformed Church Press, 2003), 2.

⁸² Voskuil, 3-4.

⁸³ *Book of Church Order*, 13.

⁸⁴ LaRochelle, 14.

pastor, along with everyone else, has been called to a particular ministry within the priesthood of all believers.

The Work of a Part-Time Pastor

The *Book of Church Order* states that a pastor of a local church is called by God to a ministry of service. Specifically, in the Reformed Church in America, pastors “are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the ministry of the Word of God. In the local church the minister serves as pastor and teacher of the congregation to build up and equip the whole church for its ministry in the world.”⁸⁵ As you can hear, the *role* of this ministry is that of “pastor and teacher” with the *purpose* “to build up and equip the whole church for its ministry in the world.”

We have seen that the mission of the church is to make disciples through worship, fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism. The minister, then, is called to “build up and equip the whole church” to accomplish this particular mission. This is the minister’s own calling to service for the church. Like any other Christian, he or she may also have other places where they are called to serve outside the local church (home, community, denomination, even another occupation or a second church), but building up and equipping the local church “for its ministry in the world” is what the congregation they are called to serve should expect from their minister. This is the pastor’s calling within the local church, exclusively.

⁸⁵ *Book of Church Order*, 12.

This is what is revealed in Scripture. Ephesians 4:11 states that God gave the church “pastors and teachers” for this particular service. Although some may view “pastors and teachers” as simply two names for the same ministry, I agree with John Stott who suggests that every pastor must be a teacher of the Word of God, but not all teachers of the Word of God need to be a pastor, such as those who serve in Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries.⁸⁶ This being said, I must stress that “pastor” and “teacher” belong together in the ministry of the pastor in a local church since, as Derek Prime and Alistair Begg remind us, “the shepherding aspect of the ministry keeps us in touch with reality—with genuine issues and problems—as we teach the Word of God. To teach the Scriptures effectively we must apply them, and, with the Spirit’s help, we can do this only as we are in touch with things as they really are in the lives of men and women.”⁸⁷ Teaching the Word of God is certainly the work of a pastor (1 Tm 3:2)—and it surely builds up and equips the church for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism—yet it is not the only thing needed by the church to fulfill its mission. It is not the only thing the church should require from its minister. Above all, as Ephesians 4:11 reveals, the church also needs a “pastor.”

Glenn Daman insists that “nothing is more fundamental and critical to the health of the church” than clarifying the role of the pastor in the church.⁸⁸ Although this applies to any church of any size, Daman emphasizes this absolute necessity for smaller

⁸⁶ John R. W. Scott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 165-166.

⁸⁷ Prime and Begg, 31-31.

⁸⁸ Glenn C. Daman, *Leading the Small Church: How to Develop a Transformational Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 17.

churches. As we have seen, many churches today are being pulled in many different directions concerning their true calling and mission. But pastors are just as vulnerable to diversion and distraction. Many pastors are being asked to spend time and energy on matters within the church that may be peripheral or even unrelated to their biblical role in the church, not to mention the many areas outside the church that the pastor may be invited or expected to fill a role, often from the church members themselves. As Stephen Norcross has said, “Clarity of expectations may be the single most important key to a successful part-time arrangement.”⁸⁹

Whatever else may be asked of a pastor by their congregation (and community)—whether it is attending Rotary Club meetings, presiding over meetings of the property committee, or offering prayers at the Veteran’s Day parade, and the like—nothing should be allowed to replace, distort, compromise, or distract from this vital calling of the pastor. All the other so-called “duties” or expectations of a pastor can also be performed by some other office holder or member of a church. The pastor has something else that requires his or her time, energy, and attention as determined by God. Priorities must be established. Expectations must be realistic. Therefore, clarifying the role of the pastor in the church is essential.

Stated plainly, a pastor is a “shepherd.”⁹⁰ The term “pastor” is derived from the Latin word for “shepherd.”⁹¹ In the New Testament, as in Ephesians 4:11, the Greek

⁸⁹ Stephen Norcross, “The Bivocational Option,” in *Inside the Small Church*, ed. Anthony G. Pappas, (Baltimore, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 67.

⁹⁰ The term “shepherd” can also apply to elders and their role in the church, especially in the Reformed tradition, where pastor and elders often can have similar and overlapping roles: the pastor as a “teaching elder” and the other elders as “ruling elders.” See: Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*. In this

noun *poimen*, meaning “shepherd,” is commonly translated into English as “pastor.”⁹² Additionally, the Greek verb *poiemenō*, meaning “to shepherd,” appears in the New Testament to describe the work of a pastor (Acts 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2) while the Greek noun for “flock” is used for the church (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Pt 5:2-3).⁹³ This means, of course, that a pastor serves as a “shepherd” to a local church who is his “flock.” Yet it is necessary to note that the congregation is not primarily the shepherd’s flock. Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:17). He didn’t say, “Feed *your* sheep.” This demonstrates that a pastor is really an under-shepherd to Jesus, who is the true shepherd of the church.

This image of the pastor as shepherd is essential for understanding how we are to exercise godly leadership and care for the church today, since this imagery is first applied to God, himself, in the Scriptures. “The LORD is my shepherd,” we hear in Psalm 23:1. Similarly, this shepherd imagery is used for earlier leaders of God’s people who were appointed to nurture and protect Israel, as under-shepherds, serving under the authority of God (Ps 78:71; Jer 23:2, Ez 34:11). In the New Testament, Jesus is the “good shepherd” who provides for and protects God’s flock (Jn 10:11-18). As leaders in

thesis-project, I am only concerned with the person and work of the Minister of Word and Sacrament, so certain Scripture passages that refer to “elders” will be considered primarily in relation to the work of the “teaching elder” or pastor.

⁹¹ Witmer, 2.

⁹² Richards, 560.

⁹³ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 299.

the church today, pastors are to be “shepherds of God’s flock” which are under our care (1 Pt 5:2), following the pattern of pastoral ministry set by Jesus.⁹⁴

Several prominent models of this shepherding ministry have been proposed to outline the various areas that require the careful and ongoing attention of a pastor. Timothy Laniak proposes the areas of provision, protection, and guidance.⁹⁵ Donald MacNair employs the acronym “GOES” for guardian, overseer, example, and shepherd.⁹⁶ And Timothy Witmer prefers knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting for the essential areas of a shepherding ministry.⁹⁷ Each of these is certainly biblical, instructive, and practical in gaining a well-rounded picture of a pastor’s shepherding tasks. For our purposes, I will propose a concentration on these vital areas: a shepherd must *heed*, *feed*, *lead*, and *need* in service to Christ for his sheep.⁹⁸

Even before a pastor can do anything else, he or she has to *heed*, that is, they must listen to, pay attention to, and yield to God in service for others in the church. This occurs in several ways. First, a pastor must heed the calling of God. This means we respond to God’s voice in our calling to a particular ministry, to a specific flock, in a chosen time and setting. As we have seen, nothing is more important to a church,

⁹⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, 300.

⁹⁵ Timothy S. Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flock: Rediscovering Biblical Leadership* (Matthews, NC: Shepherd Leader Publications, 2007).

⁹⁶ Donald MacNair, *The Practices of a Healthy Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publications, 1999).

⁹⁷ Witmer, 102.

⁹⁸ The categories of *heed*, *feed*, and *lead* are not original to me, but their origin has been lost. It is possible that I picked them up at a ministry conference many years ago. To these I have added *need* for reasons we will see below.

especially a smaller church, than a strong conviction that both the pastor and the church are called to this form of ministry.⁹⁹ We also heed the Word of God by grounding our person, conduct, and ministry firmly in the Scriptures. A pastoral life is filled with study and prayer. There is little a pastor can offer a church—even as it is impossible to biblically feed and lead the church—if the pastor lacks knowledge, maturity, and godliness in his or her own life. Some would insist that a church’s greatest need is their pastor’s own personal pursuit of holiness.¹⁰⁰ The truth that we as pastors are first sons and daughters of God who live our lives in answer to the Lord’s call to us should come before anything else; this should be the church’s greatest expectation for us since our calling, character and personal relationship with the Lord are central to our ministry.

Additionally, a shepherd must heed the sheep and their environment. In other words, a pastor spends time to get to know their congregation. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10:14). Getting to know, understand, and love the congregation and becoming familiar with their strengths and weaknesses, their needs and gifts, their setting and culture, their heritage and traditions enables a pastor to belong to that fellowship of Christians and to rightly know how to feed and lead them.¹⁰¹ As equally important, no more so than in a smaller church, the

⁹⁹ Bickers, *The Work*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Prime and Begg, 35.

¹⁰¹ See: Michael F. Coughlin, “Full-Time Pastor, Part-Time Pay,” *Leadership* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 112. Coughlin asserts that the pastor and the congregation need to “understand” and “empathize” with one another in terms of their busy lives, jobs, families, church and other responsibilities. To understand and empathize with the congregation is, I believe, an essential focus of “heeding” the flock.

congregation is also given the opportunity to get to know their pastor and, God willing, to learn to love and trust their pastor to feed and lead them.

Another important aspect of shepherding a flock is to *feed* them. Jesus said, “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:16). Again, the Word of God takes a prominent place here. Nothing takes the place of sound biblical preaching and teaching in the life and health of a church. Yet, this does not simply mean being dedicated to preaching and teaching, although these areas of ministry should never be neglected or underemphasized. As the apostle Paul instructs us all, when speaking to the elders at Ephesus, the Word of God is given “in public and from house to house” (Acts 28:20) and, therefore, is a prominent component of all pastoral care. In fact, as some have said, “Shepherding is synonymous with pastoral care. It is the practical, individual, and spiritual care of Christ’s people.”¹⁰² Whether a pastor is preaching on Sunday morning, teaching a Bible study on Tuesday evening, visiting someone in the hospital on Thursday afternoon, counseling another person in their home on Friday morning, or is a guest in the home of a church member for a BBQ on Saturday, she or he is in position to feed the Lord’s sheep by the Word of God.

This takes place by word and by personal example. The apostle Paul commanded the believers at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The apostle Peter called upon all church leaders to be “examples to the flock” (1 Pt 5:3). This activity grows believers and equips the church by providing a continuing presence and spiritual nourishment well beyond Sunday mornings. As you can see, feeding the

¹⁰² Prime and Begg, 143.

flock should occur not only in the church building but also “out in the field” where the people of God live and work, raise their children, and serve in their community.

When a pastor is engaged in activities that heed and feed the flock as their pastor, they are then in a position to more confidently and effectively *lead* them. One important key to leadership is serving as an example, an aspect of ministry already seen under feeding the church, but it is just as valid here. If members of the church are going to understand their own “ministry” in terms of “service” then their pastor must be an example of true servanthood. In a similar way, if the pastor is going to train other leaders in the church, then the pastor must demonstrate exactly what that looks like in their own servant-leadership of the church.

This being said, this leadership is directed in fulfilling the mission of the church to make disciples through worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism. This is a leading in word and deed as the pastor both models this in their own life and calls other to join them—providing a vision of what God desires of us all. As Glenn Daman has said, “The church’s greatest need today, in terms of leadership, is men and women who have a biblical understanding of what God desires the church to become as both a reflection of the person of Christ and a dynamic influence in the world.”¹⁰³ To this end, the pastor as leader, particularly in a smaller church, will at the very least assist the congregation in focusing on mission priorities, establishing and empowering a biblical model of ministry for elders and deacons, setting up effective ministry structures (perhaps simplifying those that are already in place), clarifying the expectations and priorities of the pastor,

¹⁰³ Daman, 126-127.

and leading all members of the congregation in performing works of ministry.¹⁰⁴ One important way this is accomplished is by assisting church members to discover, identify, affirm and use their spiritual gifts.¹⁰⁵ In this way, a pastoral leader is also identifying and equipping other future leaders of the church as they use their gifts and assume their Spirit-led roles in the church.

Crucial to everything that has been said about the necessity to heed, feed, and lead the church as shepherds of the flock is the recognition that, above everything else, pastors are also sheep in *need* of care.¹⁰⁶ In Acts 20:28, the apostle Paul tells us, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” What is clear from this passage is that, in order to care for the church, pastors need to devote attention to their own spiritual life and health as well. A pastor is instructed to “train yourself in godliness” (1 Tm 4:7), “to set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tm 4:12), to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (1 Tm 6:11) to “hold firmly to the trustworthy word as taught” in order to “give instruction in sound doctrine” (Ti 1:9), and be models of “good works” (Ti 2:7), among other things. Paying careful attention, therefore, to living a life

¹⁰⁴ Larry Allen, “Pastoral Leadership and the Bivocational Pastor,” *Church Administration* 31, no. 4 (January 1989): 16.

¹⁰⁵ Al Fasol, “Bivocational Ministers Need These Qualities,” *Church Administration* 29, no. 6 (March 1987): 10.

¹⁰⁶ Another way of looking at this is with the image of the body of Christ. See: Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 88. Tripp makes this helpful point: “I think of it this way: if Christ is the head of his body, then everything else is just body, including the pastor, and therefore the pastor needs what the body has been designed to deliver.”

of prayer and dependence upon the Lord, keeping a Sabbath for ourselves, protecting time with family and friends, pursuing passions and interests that refresh and revitalize our body and soul, and utilizing all the means of grace God richly and graciously supplies through the church, is a vital task of every shepherd.¹⁰⁷ In fact, all the tasks—to heed, feed, lead, and need—depend upon and complement one another. All should be expected of every shepherd, including “part-time” pastors.

These are all part of a part-time pastor’s calling, the life and work that they should be expected by their churches to fulfill. By focusing on these areas of pastoral ministry, the local church will be built up and equipped for her own mission in this world to “make disciples” who, growing in faith and maturity in Christ, each fulfill their own calling as Christians in this life. They will assume their proper place among the priesthood of all believers, serving alongside their pastor and other leaders—while also being a minister to their pastor and other leaders—who are as much in need of pastoral care as any other believer. By answering this call of God, they will all be faithful and fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁷ For an in-depth look at the *need* of a pastor, see: Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bivocational ministry occurs in many settings. Many ministers serve part-time as youth pastors, as chaplains, as associate pastors for pastoral care, as new church planters, and in various other positions in both churches and in para-church organizations while also earning part of their living by working in other jobs and professions. This thesis project, however, is focused specifically on those who serve as solo pastors of local congregations, often smaller churches who cannot afford to fund a full-time pastorate, since this is the immediate need that this thesis project seeks to assist. Therefore, this literature review surveys three particular areas that directly relate to this focus: bivocational ministry, small church leadership, and the mission of the church.

As one would expect, the written works produced in these areas are varied and vast, although less so in the case of bivocational ministry. The ones chosen to survey here were specifically selected because they each are representative of the dozens of works consulted in each of these areas; however, they are also presented due to the fact that they each contributed greatly to my own growing understanding and practice of bivocational ministry in a smaller church setting and offer the same to all church leaders in the Reformed Church in America charged with caring for, supervising, leading or pastoring congregations in this unique ministry setting.

Bivocational Ministry

Dennis Bickers had pastored smaller churches for many years as a bivocational minister before serving as an area resource minister in the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky. He states he wrote *The Work of the Bivocational Minister* to encourage ministers currently serving in a bivocational role as well to those who are considering such a calling, assuring readers that it is a truly rewarding ministry that will bless both the pastor and the people they serve with.¹ Thus he presents bivocational ministry as a gift from God to his churches, even stressing that when a church receives a bivocational minister, it is clear evidence that God is still actively involved in the life of that church and community and is lovingly concerned about their future.² As one can see, this writing is not only a defense of bivocational ministry but also attempts to assert that a church with a part-time pastor can be just as healthy and fruitful as any church of any size who seeks to honor Christ.

To this end, Bickers begins by offering a succinct and helpful definition of a bivocational minister. “A bivocational minister,” he states, is “anyone who serves in a paid ministry capacity in a church and has other personal sources of income.”³ By using this definition, Bickers means to draw a distinction between what he deems a “fully funded” pastor, one whose income is received solely from the church they serve and is sufficient to support the pastor, and those who must work outside the church in order

¹ Dennis Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), xi-xii.

² Bickers, *The Work*, 5.

³ Bickers, *The Work*, 2.

to support themselves and their families.⁴ This definition assists in clarifying an issue that has been ambiguous in the Reformed Church in America for many years. For example, some pastors are listed as “full-time” because of the hours they are called to serve but unrelated to the salary and benefits they receive from the church. There are “full-time” pastors that must work outside the church because the church can only provide a minimum salary or cannot provide health benefits for their pastor and family. According to Bickers, and I agree, they are “bivocational.” Regardless of the hours served in the church, a pastor is bivocational if they must earn a salary in addition to what is provided by the congregation. In this way, “bivocational” refers to means of income only and has nothing to do with being “part-time” in the church.

This is so, according to Bickers, because there is no such position as a “part-time” pastor of a local church.⁵ The nature of the ministry itself excludes one from thinking this way. Even so-called “part-time” pastors are on-call as pastors twenty-four hour a day and seven day per week as well as being expected to preach every Sunday and care for the congregation and community throughout the week.

This way of thinking impacts the ministry of the entire membership of the church and provides the foundation for what Bickers describes as the “key characteristics” of bivocational ministry; by this he means those characteristics that are necessary for a “successful” ministry: Mutual Confidence in the Call, Shared Ministry with the Laity,

⁴ Bickers, *The Work*, 3-4.

⁵ Bickers, *The Work*, 3.

Consent to a Simplified Structure, Willingness to Work Hard, and A Shepherd Ministry.⁶

All of these will be addressed in the review of other works—since most writings in the field of bivocational ministry emphasize these characteristics as necessary for a fruitful ministry—yet I will comment on several places where Bickers has made exemplary contributions.

First, when writing about the “Mutual Confidence in the Call,” Bickers offers the following statement: “Perhaps the most critical factor necessary for successful bivocational ministry is that both the church and the minister know they have been called to this ministry.”⁷ Most would agree that a pastor needs to appreciate a call from God to this particular ministry, yet Bickers insists that a church should also understand that they, along with their pastor, are called by God to this particular ministry at this time in their church’s history. This sense of divine calling, he insists, will build up the church; guard against a negative self-image, which is all too common among smaller churches; and enable churches to respond to this ministry “with joy and anticipation that God is going to do something powerful as a result!”⁸ A congregation with this understanding can believe they have something important to offer the world in the name of Jesus Christ.⁹

⁶ Bickers, *The Work*, 6-12.

⁷ Bickers, *The Work*, 6.

⁸ Bickers, *The Work*, 6.

⁹ Bickers, *The Work*, 7.

In the area of “Willingness to Work Hard,” Bickers balances this need to work hard with a need to also care for oneself and for one’s family, a topic he deals with at length later in this work under a section he calls “Challenges for the Minister.”¹⁰ What is especially noteworthy, however, is his comments about how the example of maintaining this healthy balance can have a positive outcome for the congregation itself, for as they see their pastor model this way of life—maintain a balance between working hard for the church, working hard in another job, serving their families, volunteering in community, and the like—they may be challenged about their own levels of commitment to all of these areas themselves.¹¹ I will also add, building upon Bickers’ thought, that some congregations may also gain not only a newfound respect for the person of their pastor, but also a greater appreciation that their pastor’s life and commitments are not that different from their own, especially a bivocational pastor. This can dissuade some church members from the notion, held by some, who suspect that pastors do not know what their parishioners’ busy and complicated lives are like.

The rest of this work highlights and discusses the challenges and benefits of bivocational ministry for the pastor and for the church. These, again, are mostly shared with other authors on the subject. The challenges to the minister include Time Management, which Bickers identifies as the number one problem for bivocational pastors;¹² Family Obligations; Finances, although he does list this as a possible benefit

¹⁰ Bickers, *The Work*, 48-58.

¹¹ Bickers, *The Work*, 9.

¹² Bickers, *The Work*, 48.

depending upon the wages of one's other source of income;¹³ Health Benefits; Retirement Planning; and Cultural perceptions, including the possible inferior status of bivocational pastors within their own denominations.¹⁴ The challenges to the church include Inferiority Complex; Traditional Views of the Church, which often means having a full-time pastor with full-time duties and responsibilities;¹⁵ Community Expectations; Leadership Empowerment; and Pastoral Leadership Issues.

This last challenge to the church, "Pastoral Leadership Issues," requires discussion here since it is of critical importance to ministry in smaller churches. What Bickers is primarily referring to is the reluctance of some smaller churches to share leadership with their pastor.¹⁶ Some of them have simply become so accustomed to having pastors stay for short tenures, or have had to endure lengthy interim times between pastors, that the primary spiritual and ruling leadership has been assumed by someone other than a pastor. In some of these churches, once a pastor arrives, leadership is either held possessively by the one who wielded the power when there was no pastor, or is never fully shared since the expectation is that the pastor will not be around for long anyway. This is great obstacle to church health, and to having a fruitful

¹³ Bickers, *The Work*, 67.

¹⁴ Bickers, *The Work*, 57.

¹⁵ Bickers, *The Work*, 59-60.

¹⁶ Bickers, *The Work*, 62.

and lasting pastoral relationship since, as Bickers rightly states, “Few pastors are willing to remain long in a church that is not interested in following their leadership.”¹⁷

Along with these challenges, there are also great benefits to bivocational ministry for the pastor and the church. According to Bickers, for the pastor, there is flexibility; the opportunity to use multiple gifts and callings; expanded ministry opportunities, especially in one’s other place of employment; roots in the community; possibly increased income; and appreciation by the church. For the church, there are longer pastorates, often related to a bivocational pastor living and working in the community;¹⁸ stronger lay ministry; more money available for ministry; and new church plants, since funding a bivocational church planter is much less costly than a fully-funded one (72).¹⁹

Dennis Bickers provides a helpful summary of seven major areas that bivocational pastors must always keep in mind, which I believe should also be on the minds and in the hearts of every church that is seeking to call a “part-time” pastor:

1. Never allow your ministry to take the place of your personal time with God.
2. Do not neglect your family for the sake of ministry.
3. Never lose your sense of calling to this ministry.
4. Love your people as much as God does.
5. Continually seek a fresh vision from God for your church.
6. Be a lifelong learner.
7. Don’t do ministry alone.²⁰

¹⁷ Bickers, *The Work*, 62.

¹⁸ Bickers, *The Work*, 69-70.

¹⁹ Bickers, *The Work*, 72.

²⁰ Bickers, *The Work*, 104-105.

Another book by Dennis Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry*,²¹ although written before the one presented above, describes in greater detail and expands upon what he believes to be the keys to having a “successful” bivocational ministry in a small church setting. He intends for it to be a “how to” manual, offering advice and examples for each key area.

Bickers does not shy away from using the term “successful” referring to ministry. He states forcefully, “It’s not unchristian to seek success in ministry.” He then continues, explaining his statement: “As a minister, you want your life and ministry to count. You want your ministry to touch the lives of people in a significant way. In other words, you want to enjoy a successful and fruitful ministry.”²² According to Bickers, it is not only right for a pastor to seek success, but the way to actually experience joy in bivocational ministry is to move out of the “survival mode” that characterizes too many small churches and their pastors and instead commit to pursuing our God-given purpose, which includes growing and developing ourselves and our congregations as the people of God.²³ This pursuit of success he contrasts with the “bigger is better” mentality that deludes and discourages many pastors and churches. “True success for the Christian,” he insists, “whether a pastor or a layperson, is found in applying God’s Word to his or her life.”²⁴

²¹ Dennis Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004).

²² Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 15.

²³ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 17.

²⁴ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 13.

The practical aspects of this pursuit of success in the ministry of a bivocational pastor is found, according to Bickers in ten key areas: 1) seeking a good match between pastor and church; 2) providing a vision for the church; 3) providing leadership in the church, including the development of strong lay leadership; 4) serving with personal and professional integrity; 5) having a commitment to your church, including a mind-set for a long-tenured pastorate from the very beginning; 6) maintaining a passion for the ministry, which is centered upon our call to bivocational ministry; 7) maintain a vital faith in God, through both hard times and good times; 8) seeking continuous growth as a minister, particularly through further education, training, and community with other pastors; 9) equipping the laity of the church; and 10) proper time management, which Bickers insists is a “stewardship” issue for the pastor as well as the church.²⁵

In every one of these key areas, Bickers often provides recommendations and applications specific to a bivocational pastor serving in a small church ministry. These are drawn primarily from his own experiences and from pastors he worked with as an area resource minister. Especially in his chapter dealing with providing a vision for the church, along with arguing for necessity of casting a vision for the church, he offers seemingly step-by-step instructions for developing, sharing and implementing the vision in the small church, including how to proceed in developing a corporate ownership of the vision.²⁶ The “key” in a small church is to begin by establishing a good relationship

²⁵ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 130.

²⁶ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 31-38.

with the “actual” leaders of the church.²⁷ They need to first come to believe that you care about them, that you want for them what God wants for them, and that you will lead by both word and deed, especially deed. This, of course, takes time. The vision can then be shared and cooperatively shaped with these leaders, to be owned by them; only after this, the vision can then be shared with the rest of the church—preferably face-to-face, person-to-person—by the pastor and the leaders.²⁸

Bickers is convincing in asserting that setting a vision for the mission of the church is an essential part of a bivocational pastor’s task. Most importantly, it will allow the pastor to minister more effectively and with greater focus on the essentials of the church’s mission. He states that “the greatest advantage a vision will bring is that it will help focus your church on its real purpose for existing. History and tradition guide many bivocational churches more than vision.”²⁹ This is the reason, he continues, that “one of the most difficult tasks the bivocational minister will have in such churches is to convince them that God wants to do even greater things in their future than he has in their past.”³⁰ Even more, “It will fill the congregation with hope and help them dare to dream that perhaps God still does have a purpose for the church.”³¹ Accomplishing this

²⁷ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 33.

²⁸ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 33-34.

²⁹ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 36.

³⁰ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 36.

³¹ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 37.

task, Bickers offers, may be the most important element in enjoying a successful bivocational ministry.³²

In his section on equipping the laity, Bickers makes a point worth careful consideration. After rightly asserting that a “correct theology of the laity” is lacking in many of our churches, and that many pastors are wearing themselves out trying to do the ministry of the church all by themselves—“while laypeople sit in the pews scoring their pastors’ efforts”!³³—he then questions the complaining of many pastors regarding the lack of commitment on the part of church members. “Sometimes the problem is not a lack of commitment on their part” he suggests, “but a lack of instruction on our part.”³⁴ In other words, if pastors truly believe in the “priesthood of all believers” then they will take the time and put in the effort of training “priests” to multiply their ministry over and over again. They will help people identify and develop their spiritual gifts and put them in service.³⁵ The same holds true for ordained leaders in the church. If pastors will not provide biblical teaching, theological reflection, and ministry preparation for elders and deacons, then we cannot complain when our church leaders lack spiritual depth and direction. This means, of course, that lay leadership development is an obligation of bivocational pastors, especially in order to assure that

³² Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 37.

³³ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 115.

³⁴ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 122.

³⁵ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor*, 112.

people's spiritual gifts are being recognized and put to use for the upbuilding of the church.

Robert LaRochelle agrees with Bickers that equipping all the members of the church for the works of ministry is an essential task of small church leaders. In *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church*,³⁶ he asserts that that small churches, like the one he has served as a bivocational pastor for more than thirty years, are "full-time" churches. Simply being served by a "part-time" pastor does not mean that the church itself doesn't have a calling from God to provide spiritual care and outreach to its members and community. As LaRochelle insists, there is always "full-time work to be done!"³⁷ This book was written to provide guidance for smaller churches with bivocational pastors that they may be able to function at a "full-time" level. Particularly, LaRochelle has in mind churches that can no longer financially support a fully funded pastor. He builds his work on the premise that "a church can 'downsize' to a part-time pastor while retaining and maybe even developing its identity as a thriving, vital full-time church!"³⁸

LaRochelle contends that three things are necessary for this to occur: 1) creative thinking, 2) restructuring on the part of the church, and 3) necessary skills on the part of the pastor (xii). The creative thinking he advocates is a fundamental reinterpretation of the work of the church, specifically in terms of what is the essential ministry of the church and who is expected to carry out the specific duties of ministry (6). "In my view,"

³⁶ Robert LaRochelle, *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2010).

³⁷ LaRochelle, 14.

³⁸ LaRochelle, xi.

says LaRochelle, “the foundational question in the local church’s interpretive process is how to distinguish between that which an entire church must do and that which is required of its pastor.”³⁹

Most helpful in this process is a series of questions that he poses to churches requiring them to examine the assumptions under which they have been operating for perhaps many generations, to determine the mission of the church in relation to their contemporary community context, and to evaluate the actual requirements of their part-time pastor—what the pastor must do, that no else can do—in order to adjust their expectations and practices. He also offers a suggested list of “what needs to get done” for any church:

- Provide for good worship, education, and preaching.
- Provide programming for youth and children.
- Make provisions for visiting those homebound, in nursing homes, and in hospital on a consistent and ongoing basis.
- Ensure that pastoral care is provided to those seeking the assistance of the church.
- Be ready to respond to emergencies quickly, thoroughly, and well.
- Have an ongoing process for providing information to inquirers, newcomers and those seeking baptism, confirmation, communion, or marriage within the Christian community.
- Make its presence known in the community; reach out to newcomers.
- Take care of the business expenses of the church and provide well for the physical plant.
- Think realistically about the church’s future.

³⁹ LaRochelle, 15.

- Maintain connection and communication with its denomination and with other local churches of different faith traditions.
- Provide adequate “mission money” for those in need both locally and in other places.⁴⁰

Once this assessment is completed, and the essential duties of the church defined and delegated, then the church needs to restructure to accomplish its mission. The key words are “simplify” and “flexible.” Too many small churches are structured as they were a generation ago when these churches were much larger, had different priorities, had more people available to serve in leadership and on committees, and had a full-time minister who was available at all hours of the day and evening. This is another area of church life that needs to be re-evaluated and accommodated to changing circumstances.⁴¹

Finally, according to LaRochelle, the churches who are served by part-time pastors should look for ministers who possess, in addition to typical pastoral competence, the skills of “conflict resolution” and “executive management,” which he defines as the ability to delegate responsibilities.⁴² Conflict resolution is required, LaRochelle believes, because of the inevitable conflicts that will arise from the changes that reinterpretation and restructuring will produce, and the pastor must be both comfortable and accomplished in managing the strife and steering the process of change within the church. Similarly, executive management is necessary as the

⁴⁰ LaRochelle, 16.

⁴¹ LaRochelle, 22-29.

⁴² LaRochelle, 106.

members and leaders of the church are inspired and mobilized to fulfill ministry responsibilities. The goal in all these changes is for a small church with a part-time pastor to thrive as a full-time church.

Luther Dorr, in *The Bivocational Pastor*,⁴³ insists that small churches with part-time pastors, like those described by LaRochelle, have been around since the beginning of the Church. I acquired this book because it was cited in the previous reviews and held in high regard by those authors. This work has clearly set the standard for subsequent writing in this field. Speaking from a Southern Baptist Convention perspective, which at the time of the publication of this book had over ten thousand bivocational pastors serving their congregations, Dorr was offering a defense and explanation of bivocational ministry with a view toward this form of ministry soon becoming the norm in his tradition and beyond.

He begins by laying a biblical and historical mandate for bivocational pastorates, starting with the ministry of the apostle Paul, who Dorr calls the “Father of Bivocationalism,” and then offering the most thorough historical survey of bivocational ministry that I have yet encountered—from the Judaism before the time of Christ to the twentieth century. He concludes that “Bivocationalism was the norm for many ministers throughout the centuries to our present day.”⁴⁴ According to Dorr, the church

⁴³ Luther M. Dorr, *The Bivocational Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ Dorr, 21.

needs to be reminded that “bivocationalism is not a new idea;”⁴⁵ in fact, the church has prospered and grown for many generations under this structure.

Similar to the authors reviewed above, Dorr centers his attention upon those pastors who received financial support in addition to what they were provided by the church. Like them, Dorr considers a pastor “part-time” or bivocational not based upon the hours they serve the church but by the percentage of compensation they receive toward their livelihood.⁴⁶ “All churches,” he insists, “can have a full church program that is organized on the resources and opportunities of the congregation in light of God’s purpose for a church.”⁴⁷

What is necessary, he states, is a return to the biblical teaching of the doctrine of the church, the office of pastor, and a theological consideration of the stewardship of time and talents. Regarding the church, Dorr states the church is fundamentally the people, not the pastor, and that a church can exist “without a resident, full-time, church-supported pastor living next door in the church’s home.”⁴⁸ This is not to say that pastors are unnecessary or unimportant. The role of the pastor is to serve the people of the church by equipping them for ministry. Dorr argues,

The work of the church goes on daily by the people. The work on the church goes on whenever the pastor can be with the people for service. If the pastor can be with the people full-time, good. If he can be with them for only twenty-

⁴⁵ Dorr, 25.

⁴⁶ Dorr, 15.

⁴⁷ Dorr, 57.

⁴⁸ Dorr, 56.

thirty hours, that is also good. The work of the church doesn't wait on the minister's physical presence but on his effective pastoral work of equipping.⁴⁹

Both the pastor and the lay people are responsible for the good stewardship of their time and talents. For a pastor of a smaller church with few church members to equip, Dorr insists that this pastor may be wasting their time and talents on office work, shoveling snow, watching the furnace, and other such tasks that do not require the spiritual gifts, experience, and training of an ordained minister; for this pastor to be receiving a full-time salary from the church is problematic to Dorr.⁵⁰ In the same way, this pastor is also accomplishing tasks that can be delegated to church members who have the gifts and heart to serve in the church, but are prevented from doing so because the pastor is occupying his or her time on these activities. Yet pastors may also deny their church members from fulfilling their particular callings in the church, whether by teaching, visiting, or training others for service because the pastor needs to put in the hours to satisfy his or her own commitment to the church. This may be one reason why the "priesthood of all believers" is more a problem for the clergy than the laity.

In this work, Dorr offers some advantages that having a bivocational minister can provide for the church.⁵¹ First, he believes that some churches may gain a more highly gifted or qualified pastor than they could otherwise afford if the pastor did not receive an additional source of income. In addition, the church members themselves may begin to become more active in ministry and take more responsibility for the mission of the

⁴⁹ Dorr, 58.

⁵⁰ Dorr, 59-60.

⁵¹ Dorr, 67-69.

church and their witness in the community, growing more toward becoming a priesthood of all believers. Also, the church may find they have more funds available for ministry and missions that would not be possible if they were funding a full-time pastor. They may also be able to bring on additional staff for administration, programs, or ministry on an hourly or even part-time basis. Instead of struggling to fund one full-time pastor, including housing and health benefits, the church can benefit from several people gifted in a variety of areas and thus provide a greater number of services and programs for their members and community.

One of the most recent contributions to the literature of bivocational ministry, written by another pastor with considerable experience in this role as both a church pastor and as a minister to small church pastors, is *Uniquely Bivocational: Understanding the Life of a Pastor Who Has a Second Job*,⁵² written by Ray Gilder. Gilder offers this work in the belief that, in the near future, the majority of churches in the United States will be served by a bivocational pastor and to commend this form of ministry to those preparing for ministry, those who are thinking about serving in a bivocational role, and to churches who are seeking a pastor.⁵³ In this way, this work closely resembles what this thesis project is intended to provide for small churches in my own denomination.

A great deal of the topics and materials he covers has already been presented and commented upon above. However, Gilder does an admirable job of answering common objections to bivocational ministry, from accusations that bivocational pastors

⁵² Ray Gilder, *Uniquely Bivocational: Understanding the Life of a Pastor Who Has a Second Job* (Forest, VA: Salt & Light Publishing. 2013).

⁵³ Gilder, 2.

“lack faith” that God will provide for their needs and are not “good enough” pastors to serve in larger churches,⁵⁴ to false assumptions about the congregations they pastor because of their smaller size,⁵⁵ even to the degree that their designation as a “church” should be challenged because of their more limited activities and programming.⁵⁶ Gilder applauds the dedication and sacrifice of bivocational pastors and their churches. “Why do we applaud a man who plants his life in an obscure place in a foreign country but ignore one who does that in his own county?” he asks. As one can hear, Gilder believes that small churches, particularly in city neighborhoods and rural areas, are to be recognized as contemporary mission fields and those who are called to serve their treated with the same respect and even admiration that missionaries often receive from the wider church community.

The advantages of having a fully-funded ministry are presented by Gilder in a way that contrasts, yet even more, that sheds light on many of the challenges faced by bivocational pastors. These include:

- The fully-funded pastor has more time for sermon preparation, visitation, counseling, and local ministry.
- The fully-funded pastor is able to focus entirely on the ministry of the church.
- The fully-funded pastor has more opportunities to attend pastors’ conferences, conventions, retreats, conferences, fellowship meetings, training events and a host of other opportunities.

⁵⁴ Gilder, 7-8.

⁵⁵ Gilder, 8.

⁵⁶ Gilder, 9.

- The fully-funded pastor can respond more quickly to a crisis in the church or community.
- The fully-funded pastor can be available for more one-on-one discipling and mentoring.
- The fully-funded pastor can establish a more realistic routine for meals and family activities.
- The fully-funded pastor is more likely to be involved in various activities of children and grandchildren.⁵⁷

These are presented not to discourage pastors or churches from choosing to enter into a bivocational arrangement, but to encourage them to take the steps necessary to ensure a partnership between bivocational pastors and their congregations that will lead to a shared, fruitful ministry for their church.

This occurs, according to Gilder, when each takes responsibility for proving what the other needs in order to thrive in ministry. The pastor, for example, should agree that the church expects from them at least the following: being a strong person of character, honesty, trustworthiness, with a strong work ethic; who believes and preaches the Word of God; is a person of prayer and faith; sets a good example by loving their church and their family; provides vision and leadership; protects them from error and false prophets; works with the church to agree upon the division of time spent in ministry activities, including preaching and administration; and provides direction and

⁵⁷ Gilder, 23.

training of key leaders to respond to crises when the pastor is not immediately available and to assume other ministry responsibilities (28-32).⁵⁸

In turn, the church should agree that their bivocational pastor will expect from them:

- The church will pray for them.
- The church will respect the position their pastor holds in the church.
- The church will love their pastor and the pastor's family.
- The church will respect and protect their pastor's good name.
- The church will follow their pastor's leadership.
- The church will respect his bivocational status.
- The church will appreciate their pastor is willing to work another job so they can have a pastor.
- The church will appreciate their pastor's responsibilities to his or her family.
- The church will support church with their attendance, service and giving.
- The church will understand there will be times their pastor is unavailable.
- The church will accept lay ministry when their pastor is not available or when others are serving according to their gifts.⁵⁹

Often, these types of mutual needs and expectations as Gilder presents are not spoken aloud, agreed upon, or even thought about before a bivocational pastor arrives at the church. At best, they may be assumed. This is not helpful for either the church or

⁵⁸ Gilder, 28-32.

⁵⁹ Gilder, 32-36.

the pastor and sets them up for conflict, disappointment, or failure. One may hope that those who serve these churches, either as supervisors or church leaders, or as even prospective pastors, will foster communication of these needs and expectations, as well as similar concerns long before the pastor begins their ministry in that congregation. Even more, for those who are currently struggling as bivocational pastors and who previously had not been provided the opportunity to have such a conversation with their churches, perhaps an honest discussion of mutual needs and expectations may be the way forward to healing and a healthy ministry.

Small Church Leadership

Once again, in *The Healthy Small Church: Diagnosis and Treatment for the Big Issues*,⁶⁰ Dennis Bickers makes a contribution to this thesis project and the reason is straightforward: he writes about church health and leadership in the small church from the perspective of one who has personally served for many years as a bivocational pastor in such a church. Through his own personal experience, as well as through working with other small churches and their pastors, he has gained a first-hand view of the characteristics of many small churches.⁶¹

In his view, many small churches suffer from serious self-esteem issues. They don't appreciate themselves as a treasure God can use for his great purpose. In addition, many lack a common vision except survival. Also, many are very exclusive

⁶⁰ Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church: Diagnosis and Treatment for the Big Issues* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 9.

because of strong family connections that exist within the church. Moreover, many have limited resources. Frequently, too much is expected of the pastor. Finally, leadership is often held by a few people who may not be spiritually mature enough or qualified to exercise leadership; in fact, sometimes this leadership is protected by serious turf wars.

On the other hand, Bickers has also experienced small churches that are healthy, vital, and fruitful for the kingdom of God.⁶² These small churches have a very positive self-image, not prone to equate church size with church significance. They share a common vision for the church that gives it a sense of unity and purpose. People are welcomed and enfolded in these churches, even though they still value their family ties and sense of community. Their members understand the importance of faithful stewardship. Ministry is accepted as the responsibility and trust of all church members, not just the pastor. And people are inspired to serve in leadership, not based on seniority or community status, but in accord with their spiritual giftedness for the position.

In order for small churches to experience these healthy characteristics, they must have a pastor who understands the culture and entrenched practices that are typical of these congregations and who intentionally provides transformational leadership in a way that values the people of the church. According to Bickers, simply changing systems and procedure is not enough; what is needed is nothing less than a church

⁶² Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 10.

transformation.⁶³ This begins with a pastor who intends to lead the church toward the healthy characteristics described above.

This means, of course, that the pastor values these characteristics and works to instill this sense of significance, vision, welcoming, stewardship, shared ministry and spiritual leadership in others. Bickers provides a framework for doing this by several means. Included in these means is providing the proper foundation, stressing the importance of proper theology and doctrine, working to have the church share a biblical vision for the church, and establishing a transformational worship where people powerfully experience the presence of God. From this foundation, as the people—and the pastor—grow and mature in Christ-likeness, one can then build an acceptance of change, the ability to handle conflict, spiritual leadership, mission-mindedness, as well as several other strengths that Bickers presents as essential to building a healthy small church.

In a time when many churches are diluting or outright abandoning their doctrinal integrity to try to attract new people to their churches, it is important to let Bickers have his say here. “Many churches are in trouble today,” he insists, “because they have abandoned their theological and doctrinal roots and displaced the teachings of Christ. No church that does this can be healthy regardless of how successful it appears to be.”⁶⁴ Since in a small church the opportunity to reach the members may only come on Sunday

⁶³ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 24.

⁶⁴ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 27.

mornings during worship, this makes biblical preaching critical to the transformation of the church.⁶⁵

For many small churches, this may not be of primary importance. They may value, instead, someone who is warm, friendly, good-natured, or even humorous in the pulpit. This is not to say that a biblical preacher cannot be all of these things, and more. But some small churches may not prefer a pastor that places a great significance upon theological and doctrinal soundness, believing that these traits may put people off or alienate their present and perspective members. In this case, it is incumbent upon church leaders, supervisors, and even pastoral candidates to educate the church otherwise.

Similarly, it is important that all these church leaders come to understand that all church transformation takes time, commitment, and focused attention. Changing a congregation's self-perception doesn't happen overnight. Neither does it occur without the changed attitudes of this leadership itself. "We need a new mind-set among the leaders of small churches," asserts Bickers, "that will see these churches as something precious in God's sight and capable of providing top-quality ministry to their communities."⁶⁶ If these small churches are to have a new sense of their own preciousness in the sight of God, then the pastor they are to call must possess this view,

⁶⁵ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 28.

⁶⁶ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 105.

along with a biblical vision of what the Lord intends to accomplish within and through them as they follow Christ in mission.⁶⁷

In his work, *Entering the World of the Small Church: A Guide for Leaders*, Anthony Pappas actually proposes that a helpful way of understanding the small church—how it sees itself, what it values, the way it functions—is by seeing it as a modern “folk society” with characteristics similar to that of a “tribal culture.”⁶⁸ He rejects the idea that these churches can be understood, or can ever lead with ease or effectiveness, by treating them like a business or an organization, even if the leaders of some of these churches might themselves say the church is like an organization or needs to be run like a business.⁶⁹ Pappas would no doubt agree with me that a new pastor who attempts to approach such a church with business principles or executive practices would soon find themselves either embroiled in conflict or suddenly without a call. In fact, to be effective as a leader of a small church, the pastor must be able to work for and transform the church from “within” the culture of the church, not outside it or against it.⁷⁰

There are several reasons for this. Small churches, like folk societies, are governed more by long established roles within the group rather than offices or titles. Often, the true leader or leaders of the church may not be currently serving on the

⁶⁷ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 41.

⁶⁸ Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church: A Guide for Leader*, (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1988), 13.

⁶⁹ Pappas, 12-13.

⁷⁰ Pappas, 56.

church board, yet they “rule” nonetheless.⁷¹ Also, the social bonds between the members of the group are of prime importance, more so than any need for effectiveness or efficiency, or any policy or program.⁷² If one member’s feelings might be hurt by a change in the music ministry, the music ministry might not be changed until that member either consents or moves to a nursing home. In addition, relationships matter more than results.⁷³ The internal order, peace, and stability of the congregation’s relationships with each other are often cherished to degree that they hinder new member assimilation or evangelism efforts.

According to Pappas, the key is to tread with care and discernment. For there are still other characteristics to consider that are related to and are formed from the above traits and can serve as potential barriers to church transformation and a healthy relationship with a new pastor. These include the tendency to value their heritage over a vision for the future; to be motivated by relationships rather than ideas; to make decisions based on feelings instead of rational arguments; and to prefer continuity, and thereby incremental alterations, above speedy changes or radical overhauls.⁷⁴ Recognizing, appreciating, and working with these potential barriers is vital for initiating any change and transformation, however small.

⁷¹ Pappas, 13.

⁷² Pappas, 14.

⁷³ Pappas, 14.

⁷⁴ Pappas, 89-90.

For example, since most small churches have been stable in structure and pattern of behavior for many years or even many generations, their nature is to not allow a challenge to the way they do things, often for fear that it may dishonor the people who handed down the tradition or custom. Even unhealthy practices will persist unchallenged for many years because of their “relationship” to the person (perhaps even a former “beloved” pastor) who originated the practice rather than an attachment to practice itself. This means that any change must also be intimately attached to a person or relationship. Pappas calls this “putting a face on it.”⁷⁵ They might not like the proposed change, but they will want to do it because it is important to a living, breathing person they care about.

Not incidentally, if given enough time, this may even be their pastor. Even a bivocational pastor will be given the opportunity to lead from “within” if they are committed to a long-tenure that enables them, over time, to be trusted and included as a cherished member of their church community.

Steve Bierly, a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America, in *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor: A Guide to Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being*,⁷⁶ offers counsel to pastors serving in small churches in an attempt to keep them from becoming frustrated or even burned-out by the unique challenges of this ministry. Plain-spoken, often direct, and always filled with humor, Bierly first details the challenges that all pastors face in

⁷⁵ Pappas, 89.

⁷⁶ Steven Bierly, *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor: A Guide to Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

ministry, before turning his attention to those particular to small church settings.

Among the common difficulties, he describes tendency of ministry to isolate “pastors” from “other” people due to their cultural perceptions of ministers, because church members are often determined to relate to us only as their pastor, and also because of our own inability, at times, to have an identity that includes any other facet of our life or personality.⁷⁷ In addition, we can begin to believe the “lie” that we are the holiest person in the church and then believe the “lie” that we are nothing but trouble and the worst sinner in the church; in other words, we are too prone to be effected by how other people speak about us or treat us in the church.⁷⁸ Added to these, Bierly discusses that being in ministry with hurting people can open our own deep wounds, leave us open to temptation, expose us to the prevalence of evil, and even alienate us from God, especially by confusing our ministry responsibilities with our personal devotion, thus robbing us of an intimate relationship with God.⁷⁹

Some of these challenges, however, can be assuaged by bivocational ministry. Working in another place outside the church, among other people, having different conversations, relating to individuals in a different environment, and the like that comes with being bivocational, all help to prevent the isolation, the loss of identity, the listening to other voices evaluating my ministry performance or character, and many of these other problems that can occur in ministry.

⁷⁷ Bierly, 15-22.

⁷⁸ Bierly, 22-24.

⁷⁹ Bierly, 31.

However, the challenges of small church ministry that Bierly details, particularly for a bivocational pastor, are all to be considered especially relevant. Small church ministry can bog one down in the minutiae of “drudge work”—everything from copying bulletins oneself, week in and week out, to mediating arguments over what color the new hymnbooks should be—to the point that a dullness settles over your ministry.⁸⁰ It can put one on an emotional roller coaster, vacillating between the highs of helping someone and lows of disappointing another the same day.⁸¹ The expectations of the church, of the community, and even oneself can make one feel like a failure in ministry, unable to keep up to the demands of ministry while trying to balance other work and family commitments.⁸² It does require one to do the same tasks over and over again, the “to do list” relatively unchanging from week to week, since the “extra” time you would have when not preparing, preaching or visiting has to be spent earning a living elsewhere.⁸³ It is often more painful that the wounds inflicted in ministry come from those whom we know intimately, since everyone in a small church knows one another intimately.⁸⁴ It is true that small church ministry often contains “goliaths” in the church who would otherwise be less powerful in larger churches.⁸⁵ And yes, small church

⁸⁰ Bierly, 35-36.

⁸¹ Bierly, 38.

⁸² Bierly, 38-39.

⁸³ Bierly, 41-42.

⁸⁴ Bierly, 43-44.

⁸⁵ Bierly, 44.

ministry can make one lazy, tempting the pastor to coast by and not ruffle any feathers.⁸⁶

The antidote according to Bierly, is to focus on God, one's call to ministry, the blessings of service in Christ's name, and above all, to spiritually care for oneself. The bottom-line, he says, is that small church pastors need to "get a life."⁸⁷ The church is not the only important thing in our lives. We are not the Messiah. We are permitted to enjoy our lives. We are even permitted to enjoy small church ministry. This work provides guidance in many areas in order to gain a healthy perspective on ministry—and ourselves. Any pastor who is called to serve in a small church, or who is a candidate to serve as their pastor, should be examined about the attention they spend to their own health, both spiritual and physical, and how they believe they can balance serving the church and caring for themselves and their families.

Glenn Daman, in his work, *Leading the Small Church: How to Develop a Transformational Ministry*,⁸⁸ acknowledges that the task of ministry in a small church is not easy, but he insists that it is not complicated. For all the literature that calls upon pastors to develop visionary statements, organizational structures, enriching programs, marketing strategies, and building plans for their churches, Daman calls pastors to return to what he believes is the biblical model of pastoral leadership. "Biblical leaders," he states, "are first and foremost shepherds who care for the spiritual needs of

⁸⁶ Bierly, 46.

⁸⁷ Bierly, 81.

⁸⁸ Glenn C. Daman, *Leading the Small Church: How to Develop a Transformational Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006).

the people. Spiritual leadership focuses on joyful service and spiritual growth rather than personal gain and success.”⁸⁹ Our goal, according to Daman, is “to transform the people who make up the church so that they become the living body of Christ.”⁹⁰

Daman correctly asserts that, contrary to popular notion, it is not the pastor’s job to “grow” the church. Instead, the responsibility for church growth rest in the hands of our sovereign God (38).⁹¹ He states,

Pastors can no more build the church than we can save people from their sins. Both of these tasks are the work of God in the lives of individuals and communities (Mt 16:18; Acts 2:47; Heb 3:3-4; 11:10). All we can do is faithfully apply God’s Word to the needs and issues of our people. All we can do is point them to the Cross. Those of us who minister in small churches can derive—or ought to derive—enormous relief and freedom in this truth about our roles as pastors.... We are merely vessels through who God works to accomplish his purposes.⁹²

As vessels of God’s sovereign work, we must recognize that the pastoral leader is not the most important element in a successful church—Christ is.⁹³ This means that every faithful church already has what it takes to be vital and healthy and to fulfill its mission in this world. “Thus, it is not the size of the church that determines its vitality and legitimacy; it is the church’s connection to the life of Christ. A church of twenty five is as much a living expression of the body of Christ as a church of twenty-five

⁸⁹ Daman, 19.

⁹⁰ Daman, 34.

⁹¹ Daman, 38.

⁹² Daman, 38.

⁹³ Daman, 43.

thousand.”⁹⁴ One implication of this truth, Daman states, is that a congregation with a part-time pastor can be just as vital and legitimate a “church” as a congregation with a full-time pastor; for both, what makes them a true church is their connection with Christ, the true leader of the church.⁹⁵ Daman asserts that every church leader must not only realize this truth but also model this truth for their congregation.⁹⁶

This has significance for how a pastor provides leadership in a small church. In order to offer guidance for pastors, Daman proposes the following definition of leadership in the church: “Biblical leaders provide the church with a godly model to follow, and proclaim the message of God’s Word in a relevant and life-changing way, so that the people of the church, individually and corporately, grow in discipleship as they influence other people for Christ.”⁹⁷ How this is instituted in the ministry of a small church pastor is the focus of this book.

Daman begins with setting this ministry on a firm “foundation”: the pastor’s call to ministry, the pastor’s character, and the pastor’s reliance upon God, especially prayer.⁹⁸ He spends a great deal of time highlighting the need for godly character in the life of a pastor and its impact on the life and faith of the church. This godly character, according to Daman, includes both right conduct and right doctrine,⁹⁹ but it involves

⁹⁴ Daman, 51.

⁹⁵ Daman, 51.

⁹⁶ Daman, 51.

⁹⁷ Daman, 53.

⁹⁸ Daman, 83.

⁹⁹ Daman, 91.

every relationship the pastor has, whether it is found within their church, their home, their community and especially their personal relationship with God.¹⁰⁰ Daman reminds us that “the only qualifications for leadership outlined in Scripture are spiritual giftedness and character.”¹⁰¹ In a similar way, his emphasis on prayer in ministry also rests on strong scriptural support (Acts 6:4). This means, of course, that a pastor’s call, character and prayer life should be first and foremost on the minds of any church seeking to call a pastor. Daman calls these the “foundation” of effective ministry.¹⁰²

Upon this foundation, Daman then builds the “purpose” of our ministry: transforming the person, transforming the church, transforming the community.¹⁰³ The order is important. The pastor must begin with the individual members of the church, including himself or herself. Spiritual growth comes before numerical growth. Personal transformation leads to corporate transformation. The way this is carried out by the pastor in the life of the church is by “shepherding” them according to the biblical design for pastoring a church, which Daman describes in great detail.¹⁰⁴ The “priority” of this shepherding ministry is centered on the Word of God: pastors are to model the Word and to proclaim the Word.¹⁰⁵ This is where they set an example in personal character

¹⁰⁰ Daman, 91-97.

¹⁰¹ Daman, 90.

¹⁰² Daman, 102.

¹⁰³ Daman, 83.

¹⁰⁴ Daman, 113-121.

¹⁰⁵ Daman, 83.

and integrity for the church,¹⁰⁶ where they teach the church what biblical leadership looks like,¹⁰⁷ and where they demonstrate the need for dependence on God.¹⁰⁸ This ministry in deed is complemented by a ministry of preaching the Word of God, publically and privately.¹⁰⁹

In all these aspects of pastoral ministry, the overall “responsibility” is to shepherd the people of God.¹¹⁰ Interestingly, Daman includes church administration under the designation of shepherding.¹¹¹ Yet what he has in mind is primarily a “relational leading” which builds upon establishing relationships with church members, and especially church leaders, in order to spiritually and personally lead them. Daman explains: “Going out for pizza and bowling may be more effective in strengthening the leadership and organizational structures of the church than spending an evening drafting a vision statement and setting goals for the coming year.”¹¹² The stronger the relational bonds are among all the leaders, he argues, the more effective they will be in developing and carrying out their shared vision and goals for church.¹¹³ This is part of

¹⁰⁶ Daman, 153.

¹⁰⁷ Daman, 154.

¹⁰⁸ Daman, 168.

¹⁰⁹ Daman, 179.

¹¹⁰ Daman, 83.

¹¹¹ Daman, 199.

¹¹² Daman, 203.

¹¹³ Daman, 204.

what Daman views as the “equipping” aspect of shepherding the small church.¹¹⁴

Discipleship is accomplished in more ways than in a classroom of a small church.

Sometimes, spiritual lessons are learned more naturally in a small church over a cup of coffee at the diner or during a ride to the doctor’s office than in the church building.

Bivocational pastors need to take note. They need to consider if most of their time is being spent in the church building, or if they are setting time aside to build relationships and shepherd the church out where their people live.

Focussing less on the pastor and more on the local church itself, in *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios For Tomorrow*,¹¹⁵ Lyle Schaller presents a survey of small membership churches, attempts to explain their size and characteristics, and proposes how these churches can best move forward into the twenty first century. He has two types of small churches in mind: those who want to remain stable in ministry and membership and those who want to grow. Writing candidly, he also describes the reasons why small churches are small, remain small, and resist growth.

Schaller organizes his presentation around three theses.¹¹⁶ First, the observation that for nearly four centuries, small churches have been the dominant expression of Protestant Christianity in North America. Second, that the societal context for these small churches has changed from supportive to neutral, and in some cases hostile. Where once our society was dominated by small institutions, from the local general

¹¹⁴ Daman, 206.

¹¹⁵ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios For Tomorrow* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ Schaller, 11.

store to the little elementary school, the contemporary culture is dominated by large institutions that do not make provision for the presence of anything not big. And third, that small churches have a promising future if they are willing to adapt.

These theses are based on a list of forty-four assumptions that Schaller makes about small churches, drawing from his more than fifty years of study, experience and practice. The highlights include the following:

- The small church is not a miniature version of the large congregation.
- The predictable tendency is for Protestant churches to be small.
- A growing number of these churches will depend upon bivocational pastors and bivocational ministry teams.
- Effective pastoral service in a small church requires a different set of gifts, skills, priorities, and personal characteristics than are required to be the effective senior pastor of a large congregation.
- The most influential criteria for evaluating staff in the small church often include (a) skills in interpersonal relationships, (b) depth of a personal Christian commitment, (c) instant availability, and (d) a willingness to focus on the parishioners' agendas.
- A decreasing number of regular churchgoers display a preference for the small church.
- Small churches tend to be institutionally hardy and tough.
- The smaller the congregation, the more influential are the key lay leaders.
- A change in pastors is more likely to be disruptive in a larger church than a small church.
- In smaller churches, the Sunday School often is the heart of the teaching ministry.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Schaller, 12-18.

These “assumptions” are important for all small church leaders to wrestle with.

Particularly for a newly installed bivocational pastor, intentionally evaluating one’s own church against such conventional wisdom and gaining an understanding about the nature and practice of their small church should be a priority. As Schaller would point out, effectively leading these small churches requires a specific preparation and mindset.

One area in particular is how the church operates and evaluates itself in terms of quality of ministry. Using the Great Commandment (“Love God...and love your neighbor”) to describe differences in how churches orient themselves, Schaller proposes that many large churches are primarily first commandment churches (“Love God”) while smaller church tend to be second commandment churches (“love your neighbor”).¹¹⁸ Specifically, larger churches are focused on providing opportunities for their members and visitors to worship and respond to God. This will manifest itself in evaluating the quality of their ministry in terms of the quality of the preaching, worship, music, the teaching ministries, the welcoming newcomers, and the challenge to discipleship. In contrast, smaller churches, who value loving their neighbor, will focus on the warmth and friendliness of their church and will evaluate the quality of their ministry in terms of their good relationships with one another, the amiability of their pastor, the sense of community in the church, and the local missions they support.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Schaller, 30.

¹¹⁹ Schaller, 30-32.

This depiction of smaller churches allows Schaller to explain why many small churches are small, and remain small. "First, they do things that are appropriate to their size. Second, they are unable or unwilling to make the changes required to grow in numbers."¹²⁰ For example, it follows that second commandment churches are more focused on their sense of neighborliness within the church walls, resist changing the dynamics of their close fellowship by allowing newcomers to be intimately included, may often neglect the quality of preaching and worship, are less committed to discipleship training, and are less inclined to insist that their pastor spend time on evangelism activities.¹²¹ In addition, the people who are part of this type of church desire to be part of a second commandment church and all that it provides them, from intimacy and acceptance to friendliness and smallness. They do not want the church to change to become anything else.¹²² If a new pastor comes and begins to initiate changes to first commandment sensibilities, without anticipating the disruptions this may cause and without maintaining the second commandment qualities, that pastor will not only see that church not grow, but will likely be shown the door.¹²³

Schaller offers forty-four scenarios for small churches to remain operative, and even grow, well into the twenty-first century.¹²⁴ These vary greatly in emphasis and

¹²⁰ Schaller, 41.

¹²¹ Schaller, 34.

¹²² Schaller, 36.

¹²³ Schaller, 36.

¹²⁴ Schaller, 103-128.

execution; it not a one-size-fits-all plan. One suggestion is to reestablish one's church as the center community life as the "neighborhood" church.¹²⁵ Another is to become a regional church for a selected constituency¹²⁶ or by developing a "niche" emphasis like music, drama, or even expository preaching; anything to stand out from the crowd.¹²⁷ Still another is to commit to carefully making the transition to becoming a first commandment church, without losing the appeals of a second commandment church.¹²⁸ In addition, small churches can shift to a bivocational team ministry with each pastor having different gifts and areas of ministry.¹²⁹ And, it needs to be said, churches can yoke or merge with other small churches, although Schaller puts this low on the list, since it has a tendency not to result in growth.¹³⁰ In any of these scenarios, and in any transformation of smaller churches, Schaller states that what is absolutely required is a concentration on the religious needs of those outside the church along with "skilled pastoral leadership."¹³¹

¹²⁵ Schaller, 103.

¹²⁶ Schaller, 104.

¹²⁷ Schaller, 111.

¹²⁸ Schaller, 114.

¹²⁹ Schaller, 124.

¹³⁰ Schaller, 128.

¹³¹ Schaller, 135.

The Mission of the Church

What is the mission of the church? This is the question posed by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert in *What Is the Mission of the Church?—Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*.¹³² Yet, the title of this work suggests, the answer to this question is not an easy one for a contemporary church to answer. Especially in light of a current imperative in many church communities and denominations, including the Reformed Church in America, for our churches to be more “missional” and more engaged in the needs and social concerns of our communities, a biblical clarification of the church’s role in society is clearly needed. In addition, recognizing that the Word of God commands us to “love your neighbors” (Mt 22: 39) and to do “good works” (Mt 5:16), understanding these commands in relation to the nature and purpose of the church is essential for every church leader.

In response to this need, DeYoung and Gilbert offer what they believe to be a balanced, biblical corrective to what they perceive to be an unfortunate drift away from what they consider to be the principle work of the church, namely, making disciples of Jesus Christ.¹³³ After examining what they call the “great commission” passages at the end of the Gospels and the beginning of the book of Acts (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 13:10; 14:9; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8), they define the mission of the church in this way: “The mission of the church is to go into the world to make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that

¹³² Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

¹³³ DeYoung and Gilbert, 22.

they may worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.¹³⁴ This is derived, they point out, not from “everything God commands” in the Bible but from those specific passages where Jesus sends his people out into the world to accomplish as a church.¹³⁵

This is an important distinction for DeYoung and Gilbert. They insist that there are commands that are particular to and carried out as the people of God gathered together as a church and other commands that pertain to and are intended to be obeyed by individual Christians.¹³⁶ The mission of the church is “narrower” than the set of commands given to all Christians and includes only the proclamation of the gospel, witnessing, and making disciples—which includes teaching Christians everything that Jesus commands them as individuals.¹³⁷

DeYoung and Gilbert insist that the mission of the church is not to try and copy what we believe God is accomplishing in the world, as if our task is to do “whatever God is doing in the world.”¹³⁸ Neither should we presume our task is the same as that of Jesus.¹³⁹ We cannot redeem or save or restore the world. We are sent to “bear witness” to what God in Christ is doing in the world.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ DeYoung and Gilbert, 62.

¹³⁵ DeYoung and Gilbert, 62.

¹³⁶ DeYoung and Gilbert, 232-233.

¹³⁷ DeYoung and Gilbert, 233.

¹³⁸ DeYoung and Gilbert, 41.

¹³⁹ DeYoung and Gilbert, 56.

¹⁴⁰ DeYoung and Gilbert, 57.

This is not to say that “loving our neighbors” and doing “good works” are ignored by churches. Certainly churches should be calling upon their members to serve in their communities and in this world as God directs them. They should also be acknowledging and challenging areas of injustice, abuse, and oppression wherever it is found. Even more, local churches as a group can be engaged in activities that meet the physical and social needs of others in loving and compassionate ways in the name of Christ. But these should never overshadow the foundational mission of the church. According to DeYoung and Gilbert, we must keep in focus what are our true biblical “responsibilities” as a church and what help we “may” provide others as a church.¹⁴¹

Bottom line, it is a question of keeping our priorities in order.¹⁴² A major factor in making decisions regarding a church’s involvement in “mercy ministries” is the fact that a local church’s resources are not unlimited.¹⁴³ Asking whether any activity furthers the church’s mission to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, and how directly it will do so, is always necessary.¹⁴⁴ This is especially paramount for a small church with a bivocational pastor. They cannot be all things to all people. They have to make critical budget decisions, including how much to pay their pastor, whether they can offer health coverage, what church programs and ministries they can finance, and how much financial support they can provide to missionaries and local needs. In addition, with

¹⁴¹ DeYoung and Gilbert, 193.

¹⁴² DeYoung and Gilbert, 235.

¹⁴³ DeYoung and Gilbert, 235.

¹⁴⁴ DeYoung and Gilbert, 236.

limited resources in terms of people as well as money, how much time and effort is expended on serving the physical and social needs of their community will impact what can be directed toward meeting the pastoral and spiritual needs of the congregation and community. Knowing what the church is established in the community to accomplish in the name of Jesus Christ, and keeping that purpose front and center in the life of the church, will help local church leaders and congregations make biblically discerning choices for the glory of God. In the same way, this may also allow the bivocational pastor to prioritize his or her ministry in that church.

Similarly, in *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*,¹⁴⁵ Mark Dever declares that the doctrine of the church, often neglected by churches themselves, is of utmost importance today. He declares that the doctrine of the church is the most “visible” part of Christian theology and is “vitally connected” to every other field of theology.¹⁴⁶ This includes, of course, the doctrine of salvation, which signifies the necessary relationship between the gospel of salvation and the role of the church in this world.¹⁴⁷ According to Dever, the church is nothing less than “the gospel made visible.”¹⁴⁸ This has a great implication for the church as a whole in considering what should designate a church being healthy or not. “As long as quick numerical growth” he states, “remains the primary indicator of church health, the truth will be compromised. Instead, churches

¹⁴⁵ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ Dever, ix.

¹⁴⁷ Dever, x.

¹⁴⁸ Dever, xi.

must once again begin measuring success not in terms of numbers but in terms of fidelity to the Scriptures.”¹⁴⁹ This faithfulness to the Word of God, specifically local churches being called to make the gospel visible in their communities, is what Dever asserts is a healthy church, regardless of size.

In this work, Dever details the nature of the church, stating that the church “is the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in the world.”¹⁵⁰ He reviews the occurrences and meaning of the term “ekklesia” in the Bible along with the various images used in the Scriptures to describe the church, including “the bride of Christ” and “the fellowship of believers,”¹⁵¹ before presenting the traditional attributes of the church (“one, holy, catholic, apostolic”) followed by the classic marks of the church (“right preaching” and “right administration of the sacraments”). He uses an ecumenical approach throughout, while also offering and commenting on his own Baptist perspective.

In his section on the “purpose of the church,” Dever states that the nature, attributes, and marks of the church—along with a church’s membership, polity, and discipline—all serve the task of worshiping God, edifying the church, and evangelizing the world.¹⁵² This, he states, is the mission of the church, which ultimately serves to

¹⁴⁹ Dever, xii.

¹⁵⁰ Dever, 3.

¹⁵¹ Dever, 8-10.

¹⁵² Dever, 69.

glorify God.¹⁵³ To further this mission, Dever instructs local church leaders to be extremely careful to “protect the practice and priority of evangelism in the life of the local church.”¹⁵⁴ He also stresses that leaders should protect the church from being divided over non-essential issues, including various kinds of ministries in the community.¹⁵⁵ Diligent attention should always be given to the purpose of the church: worship, discipleship, and evangelism to the glory of God.

In obedience to this mandate, however, Dever allows for Christian congregations to “take prudent initiatives in advocating mercy and justice in our community” both collectively “in the name of the church” and individually “in the name of Christ.”¹⁵⁶ This can be accomplished through the teaching and preaching ministry of the church.¹⁵⁷ Yet he insists that churches, as institutions, are not required by Scripture to provide these services themselves to non-believers,¹⁵⁸ only to their own members.¹⁵⁹ “The church’s main responsibility is gospel proclamation,” he states. “Nothing must obscure the church’s central obligation.”¹⁶⁰ The real need and the greatest need is for non-

¹⁵³ Dever, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Dever, 84.

¹⁵⁵ Dever, 84.

¹⁵⁶ Dever, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Dever, 82-83.

¹⁵⁸ Dever, 81.

¹⁵⁹ Dever, 83.

¹⁶⁰ Dever, 82.

Christians to hear and see the gospel proclaimed and lived visibly by the church of Jesus Christ.

Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission*,¹⁶¹ also insists that churches must refocus on its central obligation, or purpose. In this work, dedicated first of all to bivocational pastors, was written by Rick Warren to encourage and instruct all churches to intentionally seek church growth by pursuing church health. "When congregations are healthy," he insists, "they grow the way God intends."¹⁶² Too many churches, Warren states, believe and function according to prevailing myths about church growth that just are not true. One of these myths is that "quality" and "quantity" are opposed to one another.¹⁶³ Warren believes that quality refers to the kind of disciples a church is producing: people genuinely transformed into the likeness of Christ, are grounded in the Word of God, are using their gifts in service and ministry, and are regularly sharing their faith with others.¹⁶⁴ This quality of believers in a church produces a quantity of Christians who are being brought to Christ, developed to maturity, and sent out in ministry.¹⁶⁵ Warren sees this

¹⁶¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

¹⁶² Warren, 17.

¹⁶³ Warren, 50.

¹⁶⁴ Warren, 50.

¹⁶⁵ Warren, 51.

as the ultimate measure of a church's health—"by its sending capacity not its seating capacity."¹⁶⁶

Warren declares that "as long as there are lost people in the world we must care about quantity and quality."¹⁶⁷ Yet he has observed that many churches are small because they do not focus of the quality of their life and ministry.¹⁶⁸ Even more, there is little emphasis on increasing the number of new converts.¹⁶⁹ They would like more people to attend their worship services and participate in their activities, yet the kind of people they need to reach and what they should do for them if and when they come, receive hardly any attention. In other words, many small churches want to increase in size and number, but the reason why may have nothing to do with why they exist as a church. Perhaps they do not like feeling small. Maybe they want more people to help keep the church running and the building from falling down. They may need more people to help pay for the budget. There are many reasons a church may want to attract more people, but their motivation may have nothing to do with the actual purpose of the church as revealed in the Word of God.

"Every church is driven by something," Warren asserts. "It may be unspoken. It may be unknown to many. Most likely, it's never been officially voted on. But it is

¹⁶⁶ Warren, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Warren, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Warren, 52.

¹⁶⁹ Warren, 52.

there, influencing every aspect of the church's life."¹⁷⁰ This "guiding force" may simply be preserving tradition, or the personality of the pastor or other key leader, or paying the bills, or filling the programs, or maintaining the building, or keeping active, or even catering to a select group of people.¹⁷¹ A church can be driven by any of these items and still have no clear purpose for why they are doing what they are doing. "What is needed today," says Warren, "are churches that are driven by purpose instead of by other forces."¹⁷²

The beginning of this process to ask the question: Why do we exist as a church? The answer to this question provides the foundation, motivation, and direction for a healthy, biblical ministry.¹⁷³ Furthermore—and this is what is absolutely needed in many of our smaller churches—rediscovering its biblical purpose will revitalize a discouraged church faster than anything else they could do.¹⁷⁴

This involves helping the members of the church understand the great tasks that Christ has established the church to accomplish. In addition, it carefully defines what the church is not called by Christ to do,¹⁷⁵ reducing frustration and allowing the church to concentrate the time and energy of its members more efficiently and effectively.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Warren, 77.

¹⁷¹ Warren, 77-80.

¹⁷² Warren, 80.

¹⁷³ Warren, 81.

¹⁷⁴ Warren, 81.

¹⁷⁵ Warren, 87.

¹⁷⁶ Warren, 90.

This is especially good news for bivocational pastors serving smaller churches with fewer people and limited resources. When the purpose of the church is known, and the tasks that are required to fulfill this purpose are clearly outlined, then the members are not scattered about everywhere searching for activities to get involved in, or are heading out in multiple singular directions, but can come together in a common cause cooperating to fulfill God's will.¹⁷⁷ This also enables the church to better evaluate how well the church is fulfilling its mission¹⁷⁸ and assists the church leadership in providing assessment of their members' spiritual gifts along with guidance and training to match them to the various ministry tasks in the church.

Warren derives these tasks from the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (Mt 22:37-40; 28:19-20). These directives, he declares, are what should drive—provide the purpose—of every church that seeks to follow the Word of God.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, the primary tasks that a church needs to focus on “until Christ returns” are worship, ministry (or “service”), evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship.¹⁸⁰ If an activity, program, or event does not further the purpose of the church, then the church should not pursue it; instead, the church should refocus on these primary tasks and

¹⁷⁷ Warren, 91-92.

¹⁷⁸ Warren, 93.

¹⁷⁹ Warren, 103.

¹⁸⁰ Warren, 103-106.

pursue making them better.¹⁸¹ In this way, the purpose-driven church stays on course as a healthy and, therefore, a growing church.

There are several further implications to serving a “purpose-driven” for a bivocational pastor. Above all, the pastor and the leaders will be responsible for repeatedly articulating this purpose to the congregation; for evaluating potential ministry activities and opportunities proposed by church members and people in the community; and for training new members, leaders, and staff to serve according to the principles of a purpose-driven church. Also, the pastor can prioritize his or her own ministry, or even set goals for each year, according to one or more of the five tasks. In addition, the church structure can be streamlined or simplified, if need be, to conform to the five tasks of a purpose-driven church and more in line with a smaller church’s resources and needs. Finally, it should be said that restoring the biblical purpose of a church can allow the pastor to teach the church to measure their success or worth according to the ways of God instead of according to worldly standards, or in relation to the size and popularity of other churches, raising their hope and passion for ministry in the name of Christ.

Summary

The works reviewed in this chapter were chosen, as noted above, to represent the most helpful and relevant resources that I found relating to serving as a part-time pastor in a small church. Church leaders who are in the process of calling a part-time

¹⁸¹ Warren, 103.

pastor, I suspect, do not have the time or inclination to wade through even the small sample that I presented above. Especially in the areas of small church leadership and the mission of the church, many resources are readily available to church leaders in Christian bookstores and on-line, yet choosing the most informative and applicable to their setting and needs can be daunting. Even more, many of the church leaders may not perceive a need to educate themselves to the particular issues related to small church ministry. After all, their task is to “fill the pulpit,” not conduct a study in ecclesiology.

What this literature review has uncovered, however, is the great need for small church leaders to gain a solid biblical understanding of small church ministry—including topics such as the purpose of the church, the work of the pastor, the ministry of elders, and the priesthood of all believers—in order to truly understand the challenges of being a bivocational pastor in a small church ministry and, therefore, to effectively issue a call to a pastor who will serve with them in a healthy and fruitful way.

This thesis project is intended to address this need. The guidebook developed by this project will present, in a thorough and concise manner, all the relevant material gleaned from the literature—as well insights gained from the interviews, discussions, theological reflections, and my own personal experiences in bivocational ministry—to provide small church leaders with a solid biblical understanding that will enable them to better serve the church during their search process. The design for this project, and a description of the planned guidebook, will be presented in the chapter to follow.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

This project is focused on providing assistance to smaller churches in the Reformed Church in America who are in the process of calling a part-time pastor. The goal is to produce a guidebook for these churches that they can use in order to make a more informed decision when searching for and calling a new pastor for their particular ministry setting resulting in a shared and healthy ministry, one that is faithful and fruitful.¹ For this reason, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, the first task of this project was to determine the specific challenges and difficulties that smaller churches are encountering today, both in terms of accomplishing their own ministries and in finding part-time pastors to serve with them. In addition, the challenges and difficulties unique to serving as a part-time pastor in one of these smaller churches also needed to be explored in detail. Finally, the setting of smaller churches and the ministry of part-time pastors, both within the Reformed Church in America and in the church as a whole in North America, needed to be placed in an accurate historical and contemporary framework. The result of this study would determine the essential content of the projected guidebook.

To this end, personal interviews were conducted with fifteen local church leaders, including search committee members, denominational leaders, church members and part-time pastors in the Reformed Church in America, regarding these

¹ A draft of this guidebook is found in Appendix B, pages 141-224.

issues. This was followed by a review of the literature pertaining to part-time, or bivocational, ministry along with small church leadership. Due to the issues discussed and topics covered in the personal interviews and literature reviewed, several prominent topics began to emerge that led to additional sources needing to be consulted in the areas of small church health, church mission, and Christian calling. These issues were the self-image of the church and the self-image of the part-time pastor, the biblical mission of the church, and role of the part-pastor in relation to the other members of the church. As a result, these issues became a major focus of the biblical/theological and historical review that followed this study. The next step in the project is to construct the guidebook itself.

Format and Style

The intended readers of the guidebook are to include church elders and deacons, search committee members, potential and present part-time pastors, along with church supervisors and denominational leaders at various levels of church government. As a result, the content needs to be presented in a manner that will be useful and appealing to all intended—although the “non-seminary trained” will remain the primary audience.

With this in mind, the idea for the guidebook will follow a familiar pattern to members of the Reformed Church in America, as the final length, style, vocabulary, and format will resemble the various booklets produced by *Faith Alive Resources*, the major publishing outlet of both the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. These booklets, like *Reformed: What It Means and Why It*

*Matters*² and *Faith Unfolded: A Fresh Look at the Reformed Faith*³, are especially written for the “average” church member and cover topics ranging from church membership to doctrinal subjects, such as election and the sacraments. Many of them are written in a non-academic, conversational style that are easily read in about an hour or less. The chapters, generally between 6-8, contain approximately 8-10 pages each in a large easy-to-read font and are usually followed by “Questions for Reflection.” These questions can be used by an individual reader alone, but are typically intended to be used in a study group setting.

Since these booklets are already well received and widely used within the denomination, they provide an ideal “target” format for this project. Therefore, the guidebook for this project will be approximately 60 pages in length, in booklet form, and will include “Questions for Reflection” for each chapter. The number of chapters will be dictated by the subject matter of each chapter, but will be no more than 6 chapters. Since I do envision a search committee or a group of church leaders reading and discussing the material included as a group study, perhaps over 3-4 weeks, anything more than 1 or 2 chapters per week may be asking too much. Even more, to ask them to do this study together before they actually begin their search, and then to drag it out for many weeks, can likely lead to impatience and be counter-productive to one of the overall goals of the guidebook itself: to provide encouragement and enthusiasm for ministry within the church leaders themselves.

² Robert DeMoor, *Reformed: What It Means, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 2009).

³ Jim Osterhouse, *Faith Unfolded: A Fresh Look at the Reformed Faith*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 2011).

A conversational style will be used in the writing of the guidebook. Although the topics to be discussed in the guidebook are intended to be solidly biblical and theological, and I do intend to thoroughly cover all necessary church issues and doctrinal matters, the approach I will take will be more informal than academic. My desire is for the readers to see the author of the guidebook not as an “outside expert” but as one who truly shares their journey with them. The exception will be in the use of footnotes throughout the guidebook, both to assist those who desire to clearly see the sources or evidence for what I will be stating or asserting in this work, and to demonstrate to the reader that the material presented, although presented in “conversation,” was thoroughly researched and considered for their benefit.

Content

This means, of course, that careful consideration needs to be given to the topics covered. Not everything that has been said or written that may be helpful to smaller churches calling a part-time pastor can be included. However, this project has uncovered several topics that must be presented to smaller churches, potential part-time pastors, and all supporting staff; these are topics that should be considered essential for all involved to study and apply to their ministry.

Three issues in particular have risen to the surface. These were, I confess, unanticipated areas of concern when I first began this project. Yet, in the personal interviews and in the survey of relevant literature, these are mentioned by almost all parties consulted. They are, as noted above, concerns about the self-image of our

smaller churches, the self-image of pastors who serve them, and the perception that these churches are unhealthy due to their size or inability to support a full-time pastor. Related to these is the assumption that that a part-time church is not a “real” church and is not what God intends any of His churches to be. Behind this assumption, I soon learned, is a lack of understanding about both church history and current church demographic studies. Even in the Reformed Church in America, where many of our clergy and members take an active interest in our denomination’s history, there is little understanding about the prevalent role that smaller churches and part-time pastors have had—and continue to have—in service to Christ and His kingdom. In other words, many people, both within the church and outside the church, have an uninformed and unrealistic conception of what a healthy church looks like.

These attitudes are certainly found within many small churches themselves and can have an adverse effect on the process of calling a part-time pastor. Everything from the demeanor of the search committee to the expectations they place on their new pastor can be clouded by the image they have of their church and their future minister. Some members may think, like one member of a search committee I spoke with, that they have little chance of finding a “good” pastor for their small church; after all, as this person attempted to remind me, “all the good pastors go to the bigger churches.”⁴ This member went on to say that all they had left to choose from were “pastors left at the bottom of the barrel.” In addition, members of church committees may approach the process of calling a part-time pastor for their church with a lack of enthusiasm or hope.

⁴ Search committee member #4, interview by author, June 16, 2013.

As one elder serving on a search committee expressed to me: “Calling another part-time pastor will not fix our church; we need a full-time pastor, which we can’t afford.”⁵

Notice, this elder believed her small church needed to be “fixed” and only calling a “full-time” pastor could accomplish this.⁶ Other members may actually expect their new part-time pastor “to grow the church” single-handedly, in 20 hours per week or less.⁷

Many of these smaller churches are unaware that there are many churches of similar in size and ministry in their area, in their denomination, or in the United States as a whole. They think they are an oddity. Too many think there is something wrong with them simply due to their size. This is often the result of equating church size, in terms of weekly attendance, with church health. In my interviews, and supported in the literature, there is clear evidence that this is due in large part to a failure on the part of many church members and leaders to have a biblical view of church health or a clear understanding of the mission of the church. One church member I spoke with, a deacon serving on a search committee at the time, told me that “a healthy church is a full church.”⁸ Another church leader offered that the purpose of the church was to “Worship God and help the poor.”⁹ Of course, we could say that these are not wrong answers, but they certainly do not give the full measure of what the Word of God

⁵ Search committee member #3, interview by author, June 16, 2013.

⁶ When I asked this elder what needed to be fixed, the answer was “growing the church” back to the way it was over 20 years ago when they had an average worship attendance of over 100 people each Sunday.

⁷ When asked about expectations for their new part-time pastor, 4 out of 5 search committee members stated that the first priority was for their pastor to “grow the church.”

⁸ Search committee member #5, interview by author, September, 10, 2013.

⁹ Elder of local church #1, interview by author, June 15, 2013.

teaches. Even more, and directly related to this project, these concepts concerning the health and mission of the church can have a direct bearing on what these church leaders will or will not expect from their future pastor—and from themselves.

I planned, from the beginning of this project, to discuss the role and expectations of the part-time pastor. I even anticipated that I would cover, at least briefly, the role of other church leaders, like elders and deacons, along with all the members of the local church in addition to the duties of the pastor as derived from Scripture and how they serve together to further the work of the church. These still will have an important place in this project. However, after considering the discovery process that I described above, it seems wise and necessary to address these issues as the foundational chapters in this guidebook, a work specifically designed to assist small churches who are calling a part-time pastor.

Content that will enable these churches—and their pastors—to serve with a positive self-image and the knowledge that they are being faithful to their calling as Christians and as a church, despite their size, are just as essential to the impact and fruitfulness of their ministry as discussions about pastoral expectations, budget and salary, the role of elders, and whether or not to post office hours. Therefore, the draft of the guidebook, which is the purpose of this overall thesis project, will provisionally follow the outline presented below.

Outline

In the “Introduction” I will begin by acknowledging the challenge of leading a small church, a challenge shared by all leaders of the local church along with the pastor. One of these challenges, of course, is calling a part-time pastor to serve in a small church. The main focus of this section will be to provide encouragement to these leaders as well as to introduce them to the subject matter they will find in the chapters that follow. I will share with the readers the fact that small churches can be healthy and fruitful, even one served by a part-time pastor, while describing what I believe a healthy church looks like. I will also offer a simple definition for the term “bivocational pastor” in the following way: *A bivocational pastor is someone serving in a ministry setting who must rely upon an additional source of income outside that ministry in order to support either themselves or their family.* This will lead to a discussion regarding the nature of “part-time” ministry in the life of a pastor.

The body of the guidebook will be divided in three parts. In the first part, “The World of *Part-Time* Ministry,” chapter 1 will explore the biblical and historical context of this form of ministry and will place the local church right in the heart of the great things the Lord has been accomplishing through small churches from the beginning of the church to our present day. More attention will be given to some typical, harmful attitudes that people may have about small churches and demonstrate that many small churches do have a fine history of serving the Lord and impacting their communities in a faithful and fruitful way, one that brings great glory to God. In chapter 2, the calling of all Christians to ministry in the church, pastors and church members alike, will be

presented and some relevant Scripture passages discussed. The concept of the “priesthood of all believers” will be introduced and applied to the local church. Through this discussion, I will assert that there is no such thing as a “part-time church” even as there is no such thing as a “part-time” pastor. This, along with the previous chapter will set the foundation for everything that follows. Even more, I believe this will help many small church leaders today to gain a new perspective on the church and their role within her, and a new way of seeing small churches in light of our significant and historical role in the kingdom of God.

In part two, “The World of the *Part-Time* Church,” we will take a close look at the mission of the church and role of every believer within the church, including the pastor. I will also emphasize the shared roles and responsibilities of the elders and deacons with the pastor in leading the church, an essential characteristic of any healthy church, especially one with a bivocational pastor. Chapter 3 presents what the Word of God says a “church” is meant to be and do, and significantly, what a “part-time church” really is and is called to accomplish in the kingdom of God. Chapter 4 then presents what the Bible reveals about the person and work of the pastor, paying particular attention to what this looks like for a part-time pastor. I will discuss the practice of “building up and equipping the saints for the works of ministry” along with a model of “pastor as shepherd” ministry in the local church.

The third part, “A Partnership in *Full-Time* Ministry,” will be intended to be the most “hands-on” section of this work, offering guidance to improve the actual process of calling a part-time pastor to a church, so a healthy and fruitful ministry will result. In

chapter 5, several expectations for the pastor and the church—realistic or otherwise—will be discussed, including my suggestions for developing mutual expectations that will define and enhance the ministry of every church with a bivocational pastor. Then, chapter 6 will outline the essential areas that must be addressed by all church leaders—pastors, search committees, consistories, supervisors—in order to better serve part-time pastors and their churches.

Each chapter, including the introduction, will end with a section that provides “Questions for Reflection” or discussion with a group. What I have in mind is a group of leaders in a church or members of a pastoral search committee getting together to reflect, discuss and pray through these sections over several weeks *before* even a single candidate is interviewed, which I will encourage in the guidebook itself.

Evaluation Process

Once the draft of this guidebook is completed, the thesis project will continue toward an evaluation of the completed draft. These evaluations will be sent to all the participants from the initial interviews conducted at the beginning of this project, which included search committee members, local church leaders, church supervisors, and denominational staff. In addition, I will ask for critical reviews from an additional group of fifty individuals from the same types of groups, asking for their feedback, suggestions for improvement, and any other comments they wish to offer. Specifically, I will ask those who agree to evaluate the draft of the guidebook in five important areas: length, content, style, format, and suggestions.

I will also follow up, as far as possible, in person or by phone with those who desire to discuss the draft of the guidebook, or any part they may have questions or suggestions about. One of the goals of this project has always been to provide a *useful* resource for the church. My hope is that the guidebook will serve this purpose. Yet the discussions that this project have already generated within the Reformed Church in America, even to a limited degree among those who have participated in the interviews and who have discussed this work with me, have already been a blessing to us. Even colleagues in ministry from other denominations have taken a keen interest in this subject and work. Perhaps the completed guidebook can continue the interest further and be of use to those outside the Reformed Church in America as well. After all, as my research has highlighted, small churches and bivocational pastors are a normal characteristic of Christ's Church.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

The draft of the guidebook for this thesis-project can be found in the appendix.¹ As was my stated intention in the previous chapter, this was forwarded by written copy or as an email attachment to sixty-five individuals throughout the Reformed Church in America who are either currently serving on a search committee, are leaders of a local congregation actively seeking a part-time pastor, are supervising a church in the search process, or are part of the denominational staff who have a direct responsibility for or interest in small church or the pastoral search process in the Reformed Church in America. These individuals were asked to provide a critical review of the guidebook in five key areas: length, content, style, format, and suggestions for improvement. In addition, more than a dozen follow-up conversation took place between me and eight of the respondents; key elements of these conversations will be report below along with those from the written evaluations.

Critical Review of the Guidebook Draft

The feedback to the guidebook draft has been unanimously positive. Twenty-four people responded to a request for an evaluation of the guidebook and, of these twenty-four, all stated that this work would certainly benefit the church. Of the twenty-four respondents, thirteen were from search committee members, three were from

¹ Pages 141-224.

church supervisors, four from local church leaders, and four were from various denominational leaders in the Reformed Church in America, including one seminary president.

One evaluation in particular seemed to sum up the statements made by every one of them: “I read it from cover to cover and found it engaging, accessible for clergy and lay leaders and certainly timely in a church environment in which more and more congregations will be calling part-time pastors.”² Another individual, making a general assessment of the guidebook, a person serving their on a second consecutive search committee in their local church, shared this statement:

I keep thinking what a great resource this would have been for our search committee and church. We could have prepared our congregation for the change to a part-time/bivocational pastor better. I think after learning so much about small churches and bivocational ministry (never heard that term before) we would have handled our interviews differently.³

These overall positive comments, however, do not mean that there were no issues with the guidebook among the respondents. They all appear to have taken seriously their role in providing a critical review intended to improve the guidebook before the final version, for which I am thankful. I will share the most helpful reviews below, using the five categories that I requested each participant to comment upon, along with my own reflections on these comments.

² Quote from denominational leader #1, in an email response, received March, 2015.

³ Quote from search committee member #1, in a written response, received February, 2015.

Length

Most found the length of the guidebook, intended primarily for local church leaders, to be acceptable. Coming in at around eighty pages, with a 12 point font size, I was initially worried about how lengthy the draft turned out to be. What I found to be most interesting is the fact that those who suggested I “condense” the material or “shorten” the book were ordained ministers serving as supervisors of a church or on the denominational staff. None of the search committee members or local church leaders, except one, had any concerns about the length; the search committee member who did express a concern about the amount of pages was only bothered by the length of the introduction. Another search committee members even suggested that I *add* content to the guidebook, in the form of more stories and examples, and publish it as a small book.⁴

I happen to agree that the length of the introduction is troublesome and may unnecessarily weigh down a reader. The writing in the area of the introduction can certainly be tighter—as in other sections of the guidebook—with the effect of eliminating a few of the pages. I am sure in the final editing process this will be corrected. Yet, judging by the stated and actual willingness of local church members to wade through a guidebook the size of the draft, ordained clergy (like me) and denominational leaders should be left wondering if we do not, too often, have lower expectations of our church members than is actually warranted.

⁴ Suggestion by search committee member #2, in a written response, received in March, 2015.

Content

In this area of content, once again, the great majority of respondents had positive reactions and believed that the subjects and issues raised are helpful and a “great benefit” to the search process. Many appreciated the illustrations and personal experiences that I shared, offering that these demonstrated to them that I had personally “been in the middle of the mix and spoke from practical experience” about the topics discussed, as one local church leader stated.⁵ Particularly, the discussions about church health and the mission of the church were highly valued by most of the respondent, especially the search committee members and local church leaders. Some of them stated that they previously had never “thought much” about what constitutes a healthy church or read through Bible passages about the mission of the church. One search committee member stated that it “changed the way he thinks about his church” in a much more positive and hopeful way.⁶

The most well received part of the guidebook was the third part, “A Partnership in Full-Time Ministry,” which contains the chapters on the expectations of the church and pastor, and the essential points of calling a part-time pastor; in effect, a summary of the content of the guidebook. This was not unexpected by me, since these chapters were written specifically to be the most practical and easy to follow part of the guidebook and to serve as the “hands-on” application of the previous chapters. The responses I have received demonstrate that I was successful in hitting the mark I was

⁵ Quote from local church leader #3, in a written response, received May, 2015.

⁶ Quoted from search committee member #4, in a written response, received April, 2015.

aiming for. The most common words used by those who evaluated the guidebook were “useful,” “practical,” and “easy to follow.” In follow-up discussions, three search committee members and one church supervisor said that this section will greatly impact the way they “interview” candidates for ministry and will help them “prepare the congregation” for being served by a bivocational pastor. I especially appreciated however, one person who commented that this part was “clear and passionate.”⁷ I am not absolutely sure what this respondent meant, but I’ll take it as a highly positive comment about the subject matter, if not about the writer.

There was one especially noteworthy response to the content of the guidebook received from a denominational leader, specifically concerning my inclusion of insights from the DeYoung and Gilbert book, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*⁸ This leader, who has both lengthy pastoral and academic experience, stated that he found the guidebook theologically sound and consistent with the Reformed tradition, with one significant exception. He writes:

I am not convinced by DeYoung and Gilbert....The premise is that the church is called to stay focused on the “essentials” so individual Christians are able to assume your responsibility for “non-essentials”? I believe that the church is called to join God’s mission in the world—that feeding and encouraging and challenging and healing are part of the “esse” of the church—not secondary in nature. I fully understand the need to keep a small church focused so it is not left with a feeling of paralysis in the face of overwhelming needs, but to relegate to secondary or individual responsibility our love of the world, feels unfortunate, indeed in my eyes, not Reformed.⁹

⁷ Quote from search committee member #3, in an email response, received April, 2015.

⁸ See pages 187-189 in the appendix.

⁹ Quote from denominational leader #1, in an email response, received March, 2015.

This response deserves careful consideration. First of all, because the above response does not, in my understanding, convey the theology that I was attempting to share with the reader, it is of great concern to me. Either the reader misunderstood what I was writing or I did not write well enough what I wanted to say. Neither explanation is a good result for the purpose of guidebook. I do not think that DeYoung and Gilbert relegate individual Christian ministry to “non-essential” or consider the feeding and helping others as “secondary in nature.” I am not certain how this reader reached this conclusion; I certainly did not intend to suggest or imply that DeYoung and Gilbert, or even myself, believed this to be true. The main point which was intended to be expressed was that local churches and individual Christians have different yet complementary “essential” missions as commanded in Scripture; in fact, I even tried to stress—as DeYoung and Gilbert do—that local church can, and often should, engage in community and world relief efforts.

There is more in the above response that can be commented on,¹⁰ but the main issue here is that these types of theological debates—or questions in the mind of the reader—can easily distract the reader from the primary subjects the guidebook is intended to cover. Even more, I want to get the theology correct. For these reasons, this section of the guidebook will be thoroughly reviewed and rewritten; if needed, I will even consider removing the DeYoung and Gilbert reference, altogether or in part, to make this section more clear—and less distracting—from the main topic regarding the

¹⁰ For example, placing “our love of the world” where the author does in his comments. Does this, perhaps, suggest that what I present as the work of the church is not an expression of our love for the world?

mission of the church and the role of all church leaders and members in fulfilling that purpose. I am truly indebted to this respondent for directing me to take a close look, not only at this section, but at the entire guidebook for places where I need to sharpen both my writing and my thinking.

One denominational leader offered that I should have included a section detailing the “benefits” and “drawbacks” to the church from being served by a part-time pastor, as well the opportunities and challenges for the pastor, in this form of ministry setting.¹¹ I admit that I initially considered including such a section but decided, in the interest of keeping the length of the guidebook manageable, to not make this a separate section but to include comments about the benefits, and so forth, of part-time ministry throughout the guidebook in appropriate places. If this were to become a “small book” at some point, as one respondent has suggested, then an additional section or even chapter regarding this subject matter would be seriously considered.

Style

The comments I received about the style of writing in the guidebook were brief. Most stated that they appreciated what they perceived to be a “warm” and “friendly” conversation taking place among people “who care about small churches.” One respondent stated that he especially appreciated the “honesty” expressed about “what is right and what is wrong about many small churches.”¹² Another, who prefaced his

¹¹ Suggestion from denominational leader #2, in a written response, received April, 2015.

¹² Quote from serch committe member #9, in a written response, received May, 2015.

comments by stating that his mother was an English teacher, offered that I started too many sentences with the words “but” and “and.” Initially, he said, he found this “bothersome” but soon became used to the author’s “voice.”¹³

A denominational leader stated he “enjoyed” the style of writing in the guidebook as a whole, yet he found sections of the work troublesome. “There are times,” he wrote, “when you get a little ‘preachy’ and that might turn off some people. Is it possible to be more ‘pastoral’ than preachy?”¹⁴ This person did not give any specific examples from the text, and I personally failed to identify where these might be when re-reading the guidebook as a whole after receiving this comment. I later specifically asked others who had reviewed the guidebook to gauge whether or not there were any “preachy” passages in the text and received only negative replies. As a result, although I thank the respondent for his concern, I have chosen not to change any particular passage to make it more “pastoral,” but instead will be dedicated to making the entire guidebook, in its final form, a pastoral work. This is a helpful way to concentrate and guide the completed project.

Format

There were few comments concerning the format. All respondents found the format easy to follow. One search committee member, however, appreciated the use of footnotes, instead of endnotes, but stated this was simply a “personal preference” since

¹³ Quote from church leader #2, in a written response, received April, 2015.

¹⁴ Quote from a denominational leader #4, in an email response, received April, 2015.

he always reads the reference notes and finds glancing down at the bottom of the page, rather than having to turn to pages in the back of the book, more comfortable.¹⁵

Another search committee member suggested that important points in the text could be written in “bold” or separated from the main text as an insert or boxed section on the page, so that “search committees could easily go back and find them during study and discussion groups.”¹⁶ I agree with both respondents; however, these formatting features will most likely be determined by those who are more knowledgeable about printing and publishing than I am, and ultimately by those in the Reformed Church in America who may choose to receive and distribute the final guidebook for use in the denomination or beyond.

Suggestions for Improvement

Most respondents, when commenting on the categories above, usually also included suggestions for improvement in terms of length, content, style and format. Some did use this section, however, to either offer encouragement to me, to especially thank me for paying attention to and choosing to offer help to churches in this “vital area of contemporary church life,” or to urge the publication or wide distribution of this work throughout the Reformed Church in America. Some search committee members, who were actively serving on search committees in their local churches when they were reviewing this work, stated they were already using and sharing the draft of the

¹⁵ Quote from search committee member #8, in a written response, received May, 2015.

¹⁶ Quote from search committee member #2, in a written response, received March, 2015.

guidebook with positive effect. In other words, this category was adapted by the respondents to become a place for more “general comments.”

Some of these general comments offered ideas for distributing the final guidebook. One suggested that it should be sent to the seminaries of the Reformed Church in America and be made “mandatory reading” for all prospective pastors since, if the “trend” continues, many will be serving in small churches as bivocational pastors in the future.¹⁷ Another proposed that the final guidebook be made available for free on the denominational website and on the various websites of the regional synods. One other recommended that the final guidebook be available from classis clerks and church supervisors for all our churches who might now, or in the future, be seeking to call a part-time pastor. These all fall in line with my own hope for this project.

Suggestions for Further Study

There are two areas in particular that I believe require further study. The first is regarding pastors who serve multiple churches. As I stated previously, these men and women are—by definition—bivocational pastors. One church does not financially support them, but they must rely on an additional source of income from a second (or even a third) church. My own research in bivocational ministry has found that attention to this area is lacking even though there are many ministers currently in the Reformed Church in America, and all throughout other denominations in North America, who serve our Lord in this way. Their story needs to be told. I suspect there are unique

¹⁷ Quote from search committee member #7, in a written response, received May, 2015.

challenges as well as rewards to this form of bivocational ministry that both the churches and potential pastors need to become aware of and prepared for before receiving a call to ministry in this role as pastor to multiple churches.

Even more, in my own experience as a bivocational pastor and as a member of a classis with many small churches, I have discovered a great reluctance on the part of many of these churches to “share” a pastor with another church. I don’t have any reasonable explanation for this, or detailed study to support my suspicions, but I have heard directly from several members of these churches who worry that their pastor might favor the other church more or spend more time with the other church, and so I believe this has a large part to play in many smaller church avoiding calling a pastor who would serve them along with another congregation. Yet, whatever the reason, more attention and study to this form of ministry is needed.

A second area that requires further attention and study is the role of seminaries in preparing pastors to serve in smaller church or as bivocational pastors. “In light of the future need for bivocational ministers,” writes J. W. Bargiol, “college and seminary students should be encouraged to plan for a carefully structured bivocational ministry.”¹⁸ They, of course, will need the help of the colleges and seminaries in order to prepare for this call to ministry.

In the Master in Divinity program that I completed a little more than fifteen years ago, I would assert that all the mindset and training was directed toward a preparing students to serve as a full-time pastor in an average size church of

¹⁸ J. W. Bargiol, “The Bivocational Pastor,” *Church Administration* 29, no. 6 (March 1987): 14.

approximately 75-150 people. One might be expected to serve in a smaller church right out of seminary, perhaps for a few years until one accumulates enough experience to pastor a more substantial church, but it would still likely be a full-time pastorate. Little attention or training was given to preparing to be a bivocational pastor. However, as a supervisor of seminary students, I have heard from recent seminary graduates that this mindset is slowly changing, that students are being made aware that, in order to find a church to serve in today, they might have to begin in a part-time position or be willing to serve in a bivocational role for their entire ministry. Even so, they also report that little attention is given to the actual practice of bivocational ministry, although the study of small church culture, dynamics and leadership is often included in the curriculum today.

In a similar way, many seminaries seem to pay little attention to those who are presently serving as bivocational pastors in their continuing education, seminar and advanced degree offerings. Several seminaries do offer a Doctor of Ministry degree in small church leadership, or a similar subject matter, but few seminaries offer pastor's conferences, retreats, or programs specifically designed for bivocational pastors or the churches they serve.

For these reasons, I suggest that a specific study of seminary curriculum and continuing educational offerings related to bivocational ministry would be a great benefit to bivocational pastors. Such a study may reveal that attention is actually being given to bivocational ministry, and in which particular seminaries. These would then come to the attention of those pastors who are interested in and searching for programs that address their ministry needs. In addition, such a study may, on the other

hand, highlight a lack of attention paid to bivocational ministry in certain seminaries and provoke these bodies to include programs and offerings that will be useful to bivocational pastors and to the Christ's church as a whole since, as this thesis-project has demonstrated, bivocational ministry is and has always been a vital part of the kingdom of God.

APPENDIX A

GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS OF SMALL CHURCH LEADERS

- 1) What are the resources available to a church searching for a pastor?
- 2) Are these resources adequate for a small church calling a part-time pastor?
- 3) What do you believe are the special or unique challenges faced by a church searching for a part-time pastor?
- 4) What do you believe are the benefits or rewards of being served by a part-time pastor?
- 5) Do you believe church supervisors understand these challenges and benefits? Do your church leaders and search committee members?
- 6) What is the highest priority your church has for your new pastor?
- 7) How do you think having a part-time pastor affects a church's self-image? What are other factors?
- 8) What are the reasons churches look to call a part-time pastor rather than a full-time pastor?
- 9) What do you believe to be the challenges, problems or issues faced by the pastors who serve as part-time or bi-vocational?
- 10) Do you consider your church to be a "healthy" church? Why or why not?

For Part-Time Pastors (In Addition to Above)

- 11) When you were called to ministry, what kind of church setting did you envision or anticipate serving in?
- 12) Why are you a part-time pastor?
- 13) Do you believe you are called by God to be a part-time minister? (What about your other employment: Are you called by God to serve there as well?)

14) What do you believe to be some of the challenges, and benefits, of serving as a part-time pastor?

15) What is a “healthy” church?

APPENDIX B

DRAFT OF “THE CALLING OF A PART-TIME PASTOR: A GUIDEBOOK FOR SMALL CHURCH LEADERS”

Introduction

Leading a small church is no small task. This is as true for the elders and the deacons of a small church as it is for any pastor. There is work to be done, important work for God, but there is usually a limited supply of people and resources available to accomplish our mission. Almost everything—from volunteers to staff a Sunday School to paper towels for the kitchen—seems to be in short supply.

However true this is, in many small churches today, Jesus is being glorified. Lives are being changed. People are being cared for. Spiritual growth is taking place. Even the bills are getting paid. Faith, hope, and love are present in abundance. God is truly at work in our midst.

Yes, even in small churches. In fact, the majority of Protestant churches in North America today—nearly 2/3 of them—are what we would describe as small churches, with less than 100 in average attendance at worship.¹ There are more than 100,000 churches in the United States with less than 50 people in their Sunday morning service.²

¹ David R. Ray, *The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), xi.

² Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2005), 13.

It is believed that more people today make the small church their spiritual home than any other size church in this country, making it the “dominant institutional expression of Protestant Christianity in America.”³

This means, of course, that small churches are not unusual. And they are certainly not a mistake. They are established by God, sustained by God and dearly loved by God. As the saying goes, “God must love small churches since we have so many of them!”

Here is the bottom line: Small churches are churches too! If we are faithful to the mission that God has given us then we are a church. Period. The size of the congregation doesn’t determine the health of the church. Neither does the height of the steeple, the amount of spaces in the parking lot, or the number of children in the Sunday school. Really. Even having *no* Sunday school does not determine the health of a church. How can I say that? Simply because having a Sunday School in the church was not a common feature of any congregation until well into the 19th century. They are actually a new thing—like organ music and hymnals—just not as new as guitars, drums, and projectors. The only thing that really matters in determining whether a church is healthy or not is our love of the Lord and fulfilling our calling to be the kind of church that Jesus desires us to be. Not even having a “full-time” pastor is a requirement for church health, as we will soon see.

³ Lyle Schaller, *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios for Tomorrow* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1994), 12.

Every local church, no matter what size it may be, has been called by God to the same essential ministries—worship, outreach, fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism. The words we use to describe this mission aren't really as important as the commitment we have to glorifying God, to caring for those in need, to loving one another in the church, to growing together in faith, and to sharing the gospel in our community. These are what a healthy church does—whether we have paid staff, established committees or lines in our budgets for these ministries or not.

Yet, it is essential to point out, although this is what all healthy churches do, the way in which we “do church” is unique for each congregation. Not only is the faith and life of a local church shaped by the heritage, traditions and particular experiences of that congregation, but each church has specific challenges to overcome depending upon the size of their membership. In other words, small churches are not “little” big churches. “They are different orders of God’s creation,” as someone once said.⁴ They can’t be governed, grown or lead in the same way as a larger church; not only will the leaders of the church become frustrated, discouraged, and perhaps burned-out if we try to, but the mission of the church will suffer, eventually becoming inefficient or ineffective in our calling as a church.

This is why the calling of a pastor for a small church is no small task either. It is a unique calling for a pastor. This is especially the case when the situation of the church requires

⁴ Schaller, 135.

them to call a “part-time” pastor. To be honest, many churches do not know what are the special challenges, demands, stresses, and rewards that a “part-time” pastor must face. And quite frankly, even the pastors often have no idea what leading a small church is like before they accept the call—and often for a long time after that. This was certainly true in my case. Unfortunately, many “part-time” pastors don’t seem to stick around long enough to find out; if they did, I am certain that a great many of them would grow to appreciate and enjoy their ministry.

This is why this guide has been prepared. It is offered to church leaders who are in the process of calling a “part-time” pastor for their church. I also have in mind pastors who are considering a call to a small church in a less than “full-time” capacity. I believe they can also gain a much needed perspective from the discussion to follow, one that will both enhance their pastorate and enable them to feel fulfilled as ministers in this unique and often misunderstood role.

At present, 30% of all Protestant churches are served by “part-time” pastors.⁵ This number is expected to grow considerably in the coming years.⁶ Even many churches with around 100 people in average worship attendance will move toward calling a “part-time” pastor due to the ever-increasing financial challenges of meeting the salary,

⁵ Hartford Seminary, “2010 Faith Communities Today Survey” as reported by Jeffrey MacDonald, “Churches Turn to Part-Time Clergy” in *Christian Century* (September 18, 2013), 16-17.

⁶Schaller, 12-13.

housing, pension, and health insurance costs involved in supporting a “full-time” minister.⁷

I write to you as a “part-time” pastor in a small church. I also write to you as someone who loves small churches. I was raised in a small church, joined a small church as an adult, was ordained in a small church, and began my life as an ordained minister in a small church. And when I say small, I mean that every one of these churches had an average worship attendance of less than 100 people when I started, often much less. But every one of these churches was strong in faith, hope, and love. I thank the Lord for all of them.

I have also been blessed with the opportunity to be a pastor in a “middle” size church and to serve in a contract status with a “large” church as a pastoral counselor. I appreciate these ministries as well and sincerely believe that God is in the midst of all faithful churches whatever their size or shape may be. But I also say, without apology, that the small church has always been my spiritual family and will likely always have my heart.

As I said, I am a “part-time” pastor in a small church. You may have noticed that I have been writing “part-time” with quotation marks. I will stop doing this soon. The reason I have been putting “part-time” in quotes is because we often call this position “part-

⁷ Dennis Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 18-19.

time” when, in fact, I don’t believe there is such a creature as a “part-time” pastor. I am not $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pastor, or $\frac{1}{2}$ of a pastor, or $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pastor. The truth is, there is not a moment of my life when I do not think of myself as *the* pastor of the church I serve. When I am in the church building leading worship, I am the pastor of the church. When I am having supper with my family, I am still the pastor of the church. Even when I am working at my other vocation, I am still the pastor of the church. And I am glad my church thinks this way too. I am with them week by week, in word and sacrament and prayer, as their pastor. I am on-call for them as their pastor 24/7—like any other pastor. The only thing that is really “part-time” or *partial* about my ministry position is the amount of financial compensation that my church is able to provide at this time.

This is why I prefer the term “bivocational” to describe my life and service to our Lord and his churches, and why you will see me use this term interchangeably with part-time pastor in what follows. Simply defined, *a bivocational pastor is someone serving in a ministry setting who must rely upon an additional source of income outside that ministry in order to support themselves or their family.* This would include a pastor who must rely upon the health benefits supplied by a spouse’s employer; without this assistance, the pastor could not serve that church with the salary that church alone provides.

Of course, this is not the only kind of part-time pastor we will find serving in small churches. We also see pastors who have retired from full-time—or fully compensated—ministries who still feel the call of God to serve in a local church. We also know that

there are pastors who serve in more than one local church, sharing their gifts and time between two or more churches. Although I will briefly touch on these possible candidates for small churches seeking to call a part-time pastor, I will mostly spend our time together considering the typical challenges to overcome and the true pitfalls to avoid as you consider calling a bivocational pastor for your church.

To this end, I share with you my experience as a person who grew up and came of age in small churches and who is now serving as a bivocational pastor. I have also drawn from conversations with small churches leaders I have had throughout the years, with part-time pastors I have interviewed, from discussions with denominational representatives, and from a host of written resources I have consulted and sometimes argued with over the course of my ministry. All have contributed to what I share with you now.

This guidebook is divided in three parts. In the first part, “The World of *Part-Time Ministry*,” chapter 1 explores the biblical and historical context of this form of ministry and places your local church right in the mix of the great things the Lord has been accomplishing through small churches from the beginning of the church to our present day. In chapter 2, the calling of all Christians to ministry in the church, pastors and church members alike, is presented. Please don’t skip over this section—it sets the foundation for everything that follows. I personally find this material not only revealing, but exciting and truly encouraging. Even more, I believe what is most essential for many

small church leaders today is a new perspective, a new way of seeing small churches in light of our significant and historical role in the kingdom of God.

In part two, “The World of the *Part-Time* Church,” we take a close look at the mission of the church and role of every believer within the church, including the pastor. Chapter 3 presents what the Word of God says a “church” is meant to be and do, and significantly, what a “part-time church” really is. (Notice the quotes!) Chapter 4 then presents what the Bible reveals about the person and work of the pastor, paying particular attention to what this looks like for a part-time pastor.

The third part, “A Partnership in *Full-Time* Ministry,” is meant to get us really rolling up our sleeves and doing the work of improving the process of calling a part-time pastor to a church, so a healthy and fruitful ministry will result. In chapter 5, several expectations for the pastor and the church—realistic or otherwise—are discussed, including my suggestions for developing mutual expectations that will define and enhance the ministry of every church with a bivocational pastor. Then, chapter 6 outlines the essential areas that must be addressed by all church leaders—pastors, search committees, consistories, supervisors—in order to better serve part-time pastors and their churches.

Each part ends with a section that provides questions for reflection or discussion with a group. What I have in mind is a group of leaders in a church or members of a pastoral

search committee getting together to reflect, discuss and pray through these sections over several weeks *before* even a single candidate is interviewed. This is just a suggestion, of course, but I believe you will find this process fruitful.

Throughout this work, we will speak openly about some of the difficulties many small churches have in adjusting to having a bivocational pastor as well as several traits that make leading a small church much different than other churches. The presence of a bivocational pastor in your church does mean that changes must take place in the life and work of the congregation for you to be a healthy church and for you to continue to fulfill your God-given mission just like you desire. I promise you this: these changes are not catastrophic changes, they are not disruptive changes, and they have the potential of making your church even more healthy, fulfilling, and enjoyable than it is right now. What you will not find in these pages is a procedure manual for pastoral search committees describing the various steps to take to successfully call a pastor—from doing a church study to writing a church profile to interviewing candidates to issuing a call. These types of manuals already exist and are readily available from many denominations and in many Christian book stores. But what they all seem to lack, to one degree or another, is an awareness of the specific needs of a small church seeking to call a part-time pastor. To be fair, they weren't written to address these issues. So what follows is meant to supplement or add to the valuable guidance these manuals do provide.

It is my ardent prayer and urgent hope that God may be glorified and that your church may be blessed by this offering.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) *What does it mean to you that more people call a small church their spiritual home than any other size church in this country?*
- 2) *Does the size of a congregation determine the health of a church? If not, what does?*
- 3) *Can a church be healthy and growing with a “part-time” pastor? Why or why not?*

PART ONE: THE WORLD OF *PART-TIME* MINISTRY

Chapter 1

A Firm Foundation

My church believes they have been around for nearly 2000 years. They believe it because this is precisely what I keep telling them. Although our church began to worship together over 250 years ago on the spot of ground where our building stands today, that wasn't the actual origin of our church's life. Not even close.

If we go back just a few years before that, another church in our area felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to plant our church several miles down the road from where they were gathering in worship so that the settlers who were beginning to occupy our section of the region didn't have to travel so far on foot or by buggy-ride to attend public worship. As it happens, that church was founded by a group of previous settlers a generation before, many of whom were new to our country, building their church even as they were building their own homes and farms in the community. And why did they want to build their church? Because people in their homeland once built a community of faith back there, shared with them the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they believed they were called by God to do the same where they were living and working now.

Yet, even before that, believers shared their faith in the Lord with the people of their homeland. They heard it from others, many years before that. One generation, one group of people, witnessing to their faith and handing down the gospel throughout the years, even as they had received eternal life. If we keep tracing this stream of faith back through the years, we will discover that it all flows from the testimony of those who first walked with our Lord Jesus, who is himself the true Source of our faith and life as a church today.

Historical Roots

The same is true for your congregation. The Source of your church can be traced all the way back to Jesus, the "living water," who gave your church life and purpose. (John 4:7-

15; 7:37-39). Furthermore, the mission of all our churches remains the same now as it was in the beginning. Hear the words of our Lord Jesus in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

-Matthew 22:37-40

Go therefore and make disciples among the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

-Matthew 28:19-20

What is remarkable to me is how the church was able to carry out this purpose without all the modern amenities, equipment, techniques, and facilities that we often think are essential to having a strong and healthy church. Compared to us, they had very little. A small group of people, stepping out in faith to follow in the way of Jesus, were used by our Lord to proclaim the gospel of salvation, to plant and build churches, to grow communities of believers that would eventually lead to the establishing of your church and my church for today.

Few of these churches had a full-time pastor. When we look back to the churches in the New Testament, there is no evidence of any pastor being what we would call “full-time”

or “fully compensated” by a church for their labors.⁸ Nor were there any large congregations. Sometimes, when we read the book of Acts, we can get the impression that on the day of Pentecost a church of 3000 people came into existence by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Peter. True, that did happen (Acts 2:41). But these new believers didn’t remain in Jerusalem to form the first “mega-church” in church history. After the festival of Pentecost was over, many of them returned to their homelands, bringing the gospel with them. These early Christians then established small churches in their region, often meeting together in homes for worship, fellowship, and prayer. Some of those who did remain in Jerusalem didn’t linger there for long; persecutions sent them out throughout the Middle East and Europe as witnesses to Jesus Christ where other small churches were formed. The book of Acts records this story. It is our story.

The apostle Paul worked as a tentmaker while planting and leading some of these churches (Acts 13:3, 2 Thes 3:7-8). For this reason, the apostle Paul is often called the “Father of Bivocational Pastors.”⁹ Even so, the apostle Paul was not the first or the last bivocational pastor in the church. In fact—please hear this—it was the dominant form of ministry in the early church and remained the “norm” for pastoral ministry all throughout church history up to the 20th century.¹⁰ Even though many in our

⁸Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 49.

⁹Luther Dorr, *The Bivocational Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1988), 7.

¹⁰ Dorr, 21.

contemporary church perceive bivocational ministry as a new trend—or a new problem!—that the church has to acknowledge, study, and overcome today, the truth is that part-time pastors are not a new phenomenon at all, but have always existed and have always provided a vital and fruitful ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

In fact, a careful study of church history demonstrates that what is actually “new” in the church is full-time clergy. Even today, the majority of pastors serving the churches throughout the world are part-time pastors.¹¹

A careful review of the history of the Reformed Church in America also reveals many important, but long overlooked facts about bivocational pastors during the formative years of our denomination. Many of our members and pastors will likely be able to recall that the apostle Paul was a “tentmaker” as well as a pastor, evangelist and church planter. Some church history aficionados in our ranks would also know that some of our early church fathers were bivocational ministers: Chrysostom a farmer-pastor; Spyridon, bishop of Cyprus, a shepherd-pastor; Dionysius, a physician-pastor; and that Benedict of Nursia required all the monks of the Benedictine order, including himself, to occupy themselves with manual labor to financially support themselves. But very few members, or even pastors in the RCA, will be able to tell you that the very first ministers

¹¹ Kennon L. Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations: Creating Strengths and Health for Your Congregation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 13.

in the RCA were bivocational pastors and that many of our most recognized pastors from the early years of our denomination were also bivocational pastors.

Jan Huyck and Bastian Krol, the first two men who were sent to the United States in the 1620s by the Dutch West India Company to provide pastoral care to the early settlers in what is now known as New York City and Albany, New York, also maintained other vocations while performing pastoral duties. These men, called “comforters of the sick,” were not ordained ministers but were nonetheless charged with conducting worship, leading prayer services, catechizing the young, and visiting the sick.¹² These duties were later expanded to include performing marriages and baptisms.¹³ They were not permitted to celebrate the Lord’s Supper or preach sermons on their own, but by reading approved sermons and following the prescribed liturgy of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, these men effectively pastored these colonial communities. At the same time, Jan Huyck was a storekeeper for the Dutch West India Company,¹⁴ Bastian Krol was an agent of the Dutch West India Company,¹⁵ and it is believed that both continued in these dual-roles even after the first ordained minister arrived in 1628.¹⁶

¹² Howard Hageman, *Lily Among the Thorns* (New York: Half Moon Press, 1953), 57.

¹³ Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 13.

¹⁴ Arie R. Brouwer, *Reformed Church Roots* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 33.

¹⁵ De Jong, 13.

¹⁶ De Jong, 14.

Many of these early ordained ministers struggled financially to serve our churches. Although they were paid by the Dutch West India Company the same wage as their colleagues in the Netherlands, the cost of living was four times higher in the American colonies.¹⁷ This made it extremely difficult for a pastor to support a family. So it was not unusual, then, to find these early ministers in the Reformed Church in America pursuing an additional trade, often as a farmer or a schoolteacher. Jonas Michaelius, the first ordained minister in the RCA, worked a farm to make ends meet.¹⁸ Johannes Megapolensis, who served in a two church pastorate in the Netherlands before becoming the first pastor of the Fort Orange congregation in Albany, New York, was also expected to provide “duties and favors” for the local governor (called a “patroon”) as well as the pastoral needs for his congregation.¹⁹ Gideon Schatts was called to pastor churches in Albany and Rensselaer while also supplementing his “wages” as the village schoolmaster.²⁰ These famous early ministers in the RCA were, by definition, bivocational pastors.

Notice, Schatts was called to pastor two churches at the same time. This is also, by definition, a regular form of bivocational ministry. Not surprisingly, we find this a common practice in the early days of the colonial church where both the villages and

¹⁷ De Jong, 22.

¹⁸ De Jong, 27.

¹⁹ De Jong, 22.

²⁰ De Jong, 25.

the churches were often small. Johannes Casparus Freyenmoet was called to pastor churches in Kinderhook, Claverack, and Livingston Manor, New York.²¹ Laurentius Van Gaasbeek was the pastor of congregations in Kingston, Hurley, and Marbletown, New York.²² David Marinus received a call extended by the congregations of Passaic, Pompton Plains, and Paterson, New Jersey.²³ Even the prominent Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, often credited with sparking “The Great Awakening” in America along with Willem Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield,²⁴ received his call to come to America by agreeing to serve a pastorate consisting of four churches in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey.²⁵

In 1664, when the English gained control over the territory formerly held by the Dutch, the Dutch West India Company withdrew its financial support of the pastors. And, as one historian writes, “The people were not accustomed to making contributions in sufficient amounts to pay salaries and support the church, and the ministers found themselves without funds with which to provide their daily bread.”²⁶ Some went door to door asking their members for regular contributions; others like Samuel Megapolensis,

²¹ De Jong, 115.

²² De Jong, 67.

²³ De Jong, 115.

²⁴ William Dayton Brown, *History of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1928), 59.

²⁵ De Jong, 173-174.

²⁶ Brown, 38-39.

son of Johannes Megapolensis, decided this was too degrading and returned to the Netherlands; still more like Gideon Schaats wanted to leave but were said to be too poor to go.²⁷

The trend of RCA pastors supplementing the incomes furnished by their congregations continued throughout the years. Some congregations, acknowledging this need, tried to help their pastor find revenues outside the church, even providing lands for the pastor to farm or rent out. One call sent to the Netherlands in 1730 seeking a pastor for the churches in Freehold and Middletown, New Jersey, promised the pastor a seventy pound salary per year, a suitable parsonage, the use of one hundred acres of land, and a good riding horse. If the pastor lacked the skill to farm the land himself, the call stipulated that he could rent the land out to someone else for one-third of its yield.²⁸

In this way, the RCA churches were little different from other Protestant denominations in the United States. Throughout our history, many of our congregations were small gatherings of believers who struggled to receive the ministry of ordained pastors or to provide for their needs. Most churches “shared” a pastor with other congregations or were served by a pastor who supplemented their income by farming, teaching, or some other occupation. The same was true for Methodist churches, Presbyterian churches, Southern Baptist churches, and many others. Often these churches were led by strong,

²⁷ Brown, 39.

²⁸ De Jong, 118.

spiritual lay people who cared for the congregation and community in the absence of an ordained minister, or when the pastor they shared with another congregation was scheduled to preach at the other church (or churches) they served that Sunday. At times, an ordained minister was only leading worship and preaching at a particular church one Sunday per month and, in some instances, just once per quarter for the administration of the sacraments.

And yet, these congregations not only survived, but many of them are still serving and glorifying God today. My church is one of them. Perhaps, your church is one as well. In any case, we can be sure of this: we are both here today because of them; because God was at work in these often small, struggling congregations; because the gospel they cherished and shared has come to us down through the generations; and because a church of any size, as they live in faith and hope, matters to God.

Our Present Challenge

This is as true today as it was throughout church history. I don't believe it is a secret that more and more of our churches in the RCA are becoming smaller churches. As you know, there are many reasons for this. A church can decline because of a local factory closing or a change in population, because of church conflict or poor leadership, and because of a growing secularized culture or the failure of a church to preach the gospel. These are just a few examples. It is also the case that some of our churches have always been small.

And let's not forget that quite a few of our churches have not changed in size—they were averaging 75 in worship for the past 30 years—but now they can no longer afford to pay a full-time pastor. These churches may not have changed in size, but they have certainly changed the way the life and ministry of their church is carried out. Even more significantly, these churches, like many other smaller churches, may now perceive themselves much differently: as less competent, or less important, or less valuable in the kingdom of God.

They are not the only ones. In his book, *The Work of the Bivocational Pastor*, Dennis Bickers tells about a conversation that he overheard while in a Christian bookstore between two recent seminary graduates, one of whom worked in the store. They were discussing their ongoing search for a church to serve in as new pastors and were expressing their frustrations in what calls were being offered to them. One of these men stated that the only calls he was receiving came from a few small churches in rural areas. He then declared, quite dismissively, that “he wasn’t going to waste time with those churches.”²⁹

Attitudes like this toward smaller churches are not uncommon. Neither are they confined to recent seminary graduates. Many people, clergy and laity alike, have a notion that smaller churches are inferior to larger churches; are less healthy and more difficult to lead than more substantial churches; and that they have failed, or are failing,

²⁹ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Pastor*, 4.

to provide for the spiritual needs of their members and communities. As David Ray has said, himself a small church pastor, "To many, small means failure, inadequacy, immaturity, or a stage that precedes legitimacy."³⁰

These views, unfortunately, are often held by smaller churches about themselves.

Dennis Bickers insists that many small churches have serious struggles in how positively they should view themselves.³¹ David Ray agrees. "The largest problem facing smaller churches," he writes, "is not a shortage of people or money. Instead, the most dominating and debilitating problem is more often low moral, resulting in negative self-esteem."³²

In the same way, many people have a low opinion of the pastors who serve in these smaller churches. After all, they may sometimes think, if they were any good, wouldn't they be in a bigger church, or have a more substantial ministry, or be offered a position in a church that would pay them more? This way of thinking is too often applied to part-time pastors. Why can't he get a call to a full-time church? What's wrong with him? Why can't she move on from there? What has she done?

³⁰ Ray, x.

³¹ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Pastor*, 5.

³² Ray, 191.

I appreciate what Ray Gilder, a pastor to bivocational ministers, has to say about this. He reminds us that we often applaud missionaries who plant their lives in obscure places in foreign countries among small communities of people while, at the same time, we ignore or dismiss pastors who do the very same thing in our own country.³³ He has a point. I used to think this way. Since then, I have learned that small churches should be considered contemporary “mission fields” and the pastors who are called to serve in them need to be treated with the same respect and even admiration that missionaries often receive from the wider church community.

At times, those who hold this low view of small church pastors, and part-time calls, sometimes include the pastors themselves.³⁴ We are sometimes prone to being affected by what others think of us, and what others think of our churches. The result is that we are made to feel like second class citizens—along with our churches—in the kingdom of God compared to others.³⁵ This is not a good mindset for ministry. Nor is it likely to produce any long-tenured pastorates.

Sadly this perception makes finding ministers to serve in small churches or to accept a call to a part-time pastorate increasingly difficult. Some think that it is hard to fill an

³³ Ray Gilder, *Uniquely Bivocational: Understanding the Life of a Pastor Who Has a Second Job* (Forest, VA: Salt and Light Publishing, 2013), 9.

³⁴ Steve R. Bierly, *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor: A Guide to Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 38-41.

³⁵ Bickers, 57-58.

empty pulpit in a small church because there is a shortage of ministers. A recent study has concluded that this is not the case. There is no shortage of ministers; there is, instead, an increasing number of ministers who are reluctant to serve in these ministries.³⁶ Truth be told, to many pastors, ministry in small churches has a bad reputation. It is not fair, but it is a reality that must be acknowledged. And let's face it: at times, there is some truth to it. If a church doesn't seem excited about ministry, or is resistant to change; if it lacks a vision for the future, or has a negative self-image simply because it is small or struggles to pay the bills, then it may not be an attractive call for any pastor.

For some churches, the simple fact of having a part-time pastor, or having to "downsize" to a part-time pastor, leads a church to a negative self-perception. After all, "real" churches have a full-time minister, don't they? They will often think that, if they can only build up their numbers and finances again to afford a full-time minister, then the church will be vital and healthy again. In some cases that may be true. Yet, let's not forget that many of our churches actually declined under the leadership of a full-time pastor. And many of our churches have been revived, have grown and thrived, under the leadership of a part-time pastor. Maybe, having a full-time pastor versus having a part-time pastor is not a major key to church health, after all. Perhaps, the real key to church health, the person we should be looking for, is the *right* pastor for the church.

What do you think?

³⁶ Patricia M. Y. Chang, "Assessing the Clergy Supply in the 21st Century," *Pulpit and Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership*, 2004.

I think that there is no reason for a congregation to feel bad about themselves simply because they are small in numbers, they do not have many resources, or don't have a full-time pastor. And pastors should not imagine that God thinks any less of them because they are serving in a small church, as a part-time pastor, and in a ministry that few people honor, admire, or esteem. Unless, of course, they have a good reason to.

Let's face it: some churches and some pastors should feel bad about themselves. Some churches have abandoned the gospel, have been rife with conflict, are controlled by boorish leaders, do "chew-up-and-spit-out new pastors," or have been served by lazy or incompetent ministers. It does happen, right?

However, this is not true of *all* small churches. I do not believe it is anywhere near a majority of small churches. Instead, let me go so far as to say that I believe the majority of small churches are faithful congregations genuinely committed to loving God and their neighbor.

This does not mean we are perfect. Sometimes we are not as eager to invite our friends and family to church as we used to be. Sometimes we are not as willing to share our faith with our neighbors as we should be. Sometimes we are not as open to accommodating the music of worship to the likes of others as we know we should be. And yes, sometimes, we resist change. We really don't like it very much.

But know this: these behaviors are not confined to small churches. Congregations of 100, and 200, and even 300 also fall into these patterns. Larger churches are just as prone to settle in and get comfortable as smaller churches. However, please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I am not saying that this behavior is OK because "everyone is doing it." What I am saying is that no church is perfect, that smaller churches don't get "a pass" from fulfilling their God-given purpose just because they are small, and that every church has to work hard at being the church of Jesus Christ. This applies to the members and pastors alike.

Not every congregation—or pastor—knows what a "healthy" small church looks like. Many of us just "do church" the way we've been used to doing it for years without giving it much thought. This must be what a church does, we think; after all, this is the way it has been done here for years! Some of us are trained to think about our church, and the way our church is supposed to function, by those who have been around our church awhile. For example, if we are a newly elected deacon on consistory, and if during our first few consistory meetings the discussions center on paying the bills and planning the next church supper, then you might form the impression that the leadership of the church is only called by the Lord to "manage" the church. On the other hand, if conversations were focused primarily on bringing communion to the shut-ins, how to enhance the experience of worship during the Sunday services, and ways to share the gospel with your community, you will likely come away with a much different idea about the role of leaders in your church.

So, what does a “healthy” small church look like? I am convinced that a healthy small church has a positive self-image; they are not prone to equating size with significance in the eyes of God. They know the true mission of the church, derived from the Word of God, which gives their congregation a sense of unity and purpose. In all ways, they are devoted to following the teachings of the Bible. People are welcomed and enfolded into these churches, even as they continue to highly value family ties, heritage, and tradition. Their members understand the importance of faithful stewardship. Ministry is embraced as the calling of every Christian, not just the pastor. Leadership is based on spiritual maturity and giftedness, not on seniority or community status. And, above all, Jesus is proclaimed as their Lord and Savior, as true Head of the His church.³⁷

The same could be said about the role of the pastor—that many people within the church do not really know what a pastor is supposed to be and do. Many of us assume we know what a pastor is supposed to be and do in the church—some of us have been keeping watch on our pastors for years—but do we really know what the Word of God reveals about this important ministry to His church? What about a part-time pastor? Is the ministry of a part-time pastor somehow different than a full-time pastor?

The answers to these questions seem obvious, but they aren’t. They are derived from our understanding of the nature and purpose of the church as well as our appreciation of who all of us are—pastors and members alike—as disciples of Jesus Christ and

³⁷ See Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 10.

members of His church. For a small church to have a healthy and fruitful ministry with their part-time pastor, both the pastor and the congregation need to hear and follow what the Bible has to say about these things. We will turn our attention to these questions in the next chapter.

Our Hope

The good news for small churches is that, with the right leadership, you can enjoy a strong, healthy and fruitful ministry. As long as your pastor—and you—have an understanding, heart, and vision for the small church, you are on the right path.

I am certain that the most critical factor necessary to having a healthy and fruitful ministry—for a part-time pastor *and* the church they serve with—is for both to know they have been called by God to this ministry for their time and place. Most people, I suspect, would agree with me that the pastor needs to appreciate a call from God to this particular ministry. But the church should also understand that they, along with their pastor, are called by God to this particular ministry at this time in their church's history.

This sense of divine calling will build up the church. It will guard against a negative self-image. And it will enable that church to respond to this form of ministry with hope and great anticipation that God is preparing to do something great and glorious through

them. A congregation with this mindset will believe that they have something significant to offer the world in the name of Jesus Christ.³⁸

Today, there are many small churches that are healthy and thriving in this way. And there are many pastors serving in these churches who are gratified and grateful for their unique calling and are producing good fruit for the kingdom of God, fruit that will last. They see their churches as precious in the sight of God and capable of providing quality ministry in their community. Together with their congregations they are models of Christian faith and ministry. What does this look like? As Anthony Pappas has so well written:

Leadership that seeks God's heart, leadership that loves the small church, leadership that understands the nature of the small church and can act appropriately within it. This type of leadership cares about the small church. It believes that each congregation is a magnificent creation of almighty God and that each congregation is called to a ministry that it alone can accomplish. It believes that each congregation, no matter how small, is a mission outpost in its time and place. And it believes that each congregation has its own wonder and beauty that by, believing in it, can be released.³⁹

Questions for Reflection

- 1) *Does knowing that churches have mostly been led by part-time pastors throughout church history change your understanding—or opinion—of part-time pastors?*
- 2) *How many churches in your area, or classis, are served by part-time pastors?*

³⁸ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*, 6-7.

³⁹ Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church* (Bethesda, MD.: Alban Institute, 2000), 9.

3) *How high or low a view do you hold for part-time pastors? Can you say why?*

4) *Why do you think small churches often have a negative self-image?*

5) *What does a healthy small church look like to you?*

Chapter 2

Our Calling

One thing is absolutely clear in the Word of God—all Christians are called to full-time ministry. All Christians are called to bear fruit as disciples of Jesus Christ (Jn 15:5-8). Jesus insists, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” (Jn 15:16).

This is the case of every believer regardless of what your work is. If you are a believer—and if you work as a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker—you are “called” into full-time Christian ministry. The manner in which we carry out our calling will be unique to our gifts, passions, professions, locations, and even our personalities, but we all share the same experience of being “called” by God.

This must be kept in mind as we explore the call of a pastor to a “part-time” church. As a believer, a pastor in a “part-time” church is already called to a full-time ministry, just

like every other Christian. Even when a pastor is working as a registered nurse on the night shift or driving a bus on weekday mornings, they remain always in full-time ministry. “Whatever you do, in word and deed,” we are commanded, “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17).

Remember, the apostle Paul was working as a tentmaker while engaged in pastoral ministry. Is it appropriate to say that he only served the Lord or His people part-time? Not really. When God calls a person, His call engages a person’s whole being in service to the Lord. Our whole being means: who we are and what we do; all our time and all our life. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39).

Are you ready to do some theology? Let’s first take a closer look at what it means to be “called” a Christian.

The Calling of a Christian

This calling, as Os Guinness defines it, “is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.”⁴⁰ Simply stated, we are called to be Christians, first and foremost, and this reality influences every aspect of our lives.

⁴⁰ Guinness, 4.

This is our life's primary calling, or vocation, from which every other "calling" we receive in our life is derived and depends. By God's grace, this includes a call to relationship with God through Jesus Christ, a call to a new way of life in Christ involving our character and conduct, and a call to Christian service which God has prepared especially for us (Eph 2:8-10).⁴¹ As you can see, the first calling we receive is a *calling to salvation*. Essentially, we are called *to* God. This is what makes us a believer in the first place—a person who knows and has been saved by God—and who is now "called" a child of God.⁴²

What follows this call *to* God is a call to live *like* God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). "Be imitators of God, the apostle Paul explains, "as beloved children" (Eph 5:1). All the moral instruction in the Bible unfolds what this looks like in a believer's life, but the true portrait of the Christian life is found most fully in Jesus Christ, not simply in his teaching, but in his own life as well. We are called to live through Jesus (Gal 2:20), by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Gal 5:25), that we would be holy and blameless before God (Eph 1:4), maturing into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29). One can say that our primary vocation to be a Christian also contains a calling to be *like* Christ. This is our second calling, which I refer to as our *calling to sanctification*.

⁴¹ Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2004), 19-20. I am indebted to these pastors for this three-fold understanding of God's call, which I will build upon below.

⁴² Edmond P. Clowney, *Called to Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1964), 10.

Are you still with me? Because only after we understand these callings can we appreciate the next calling, the calling to ministry, which is bound to and flows from the previous ones. In my mind, they form the “trinity” of our Christian vocation; there is not one without the others. Even as we are called *to* God, and called to be *like* God, we are also called *for* God. This is our third calling, which I refer to as our *calling to service*.

These callings to salvation, sanctification, and service are simply three aspects of our Christian vocation. It is appropriate to talk of three distinct “callings” as part of a single call to Christian vocation because these three callings are often heard at different times in a believer’s life. As we mature in the life of faith, as we receive and apply Word and Sacrament to our lives, as we participate in the worship and fellowship and mission of the church, our calling to sanctification and our own calling to service will be heard.

Since, then, all Christians are called to a life of service, a life *for* God, a life of full-time ministry, what form of work or activities should this be? What about a bivocational pastors? Are only full-time pastors properly living out their Christian vocation?

The Calling of a Part-Time Pastor

Certainly, it must be said, that full-time pastors are fulfilling their calling to *service* as an aspect of their Christian vocation. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, two long-time pastors, define the calling to pastoral ministry as “the unmistakable conviction an individual

possesses that God wants him to do a specific task.”⁴³ As a pastor, I like the sound of that. And I wholeheartedly agree. But this statement also suggests a necessary question: How much of a person’s life is to be occupied with a specific task? In other words, if we agree what the “specific task” of ministry is, does that leave room for anything else?

This is a question about the whole life of a Christian pastor. It involves not only the roles and duties one carries out as a pastor of a church—preaching and teaching, and so forth—but also includes everything else a pastor does and everyone else a pastor sees, whether it is in the church, in the home, in the grocery store, on the golf course, or out on the street. All of these are places and people to be touched by a pastor’s ministry, for all of these belong to God (Ps 24:1).

This means, as I will insist again, that there is never a time that a pastor is not “the pastor” of the church. Many hour a week are spent within the walls of the church building, or in the homes of church families, or in the hospital with church members and friends, but there are other hours that occupy the pastor’s week that are “outside” the church. In either case, one does not stop being the pastor of the church. This is as true for part-time pastors as it is for full-time pastors. As a part-time pastor, I remain the pastor while I am having dinner with my family, when I am sitting in the service station waiting for an oil change on my car, and even when I am on a two-week vacation in

⁴³ Prime and Begg, 18.

Maine. This is so even when I am working as a registered nurse, what many in my church call my “other job.”

The truth is: pastoral ministry is never a part-time calling. As Dennis Bickers has stated about his own duties as a bivocational pastor:

I had the same number of sermons to prepare as pastors of much larger churches. (In fact, I may have had more sermons to prepare because I didn’t have people on staff to preach for me.) My members went into the hospital and expected pastoral visits. Church members and others in the community called upon me to conduct their weddings and officiate at their funerals. Like many pastors, I was on call 24/7, and I was excited to be involved in the lives of our congregation.⁴⁴

It is clear, then, there is no difference in the calling of a part-time pastor compared to a full-time pastor. In fact, the only real distinction—which does not change the nature of the calling itself—is the actual number of hours per week that one is contracted to perform the duties of a pastor within the church. Some bivocational pastors see the work they do outside the church as work they do *for* the church—as if they are still working for the church—since this “other job” actually allows them to serve in a church that can’t afford to fully pay them otherwise. In any event, we remain in full-time ministry no matter where we are, what we are doing, or who we are with. And as we will see, it doesn’t change the “specific task” of pastoral ministry either.

⁴⁴ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Pastor*, 3.

This is simply a pastor's response to the call of God on his or her life. It is one aspect of our Christian vocation—along with being a spouse, a parent, a friend, a neighbor, and the like. And it is just as personal and just as sacred as a Christian answering a call of God to be a nurse, a mechanic, a teacher, or a mother, as they live the whole of their life *for* God and His glory. As Martin Luther has said, “The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.”⁴⁵

This being said, a person can be called by God to be a nurse or a pastor, a farmer or a pastor, a mother or a pastor—or even both—in our calling to service for the Lord. The essential trait of every Christian ministry, for the pastor or the homemaker alike, is simply this: “Whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17).

The Priesthood of All Believers

The pastor is not the only “minister” in the church. The term “to minister” simply means “to serve.” For this reason, John Stott, in *Basic Christianity*, asserts, “God calls every Christian to ministry, that is, to service, to be the servant of other people for the sake of Christ.”⁴⁶ This calling to service is received and clarified within the church. Even

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (n.p.: FigBooks, 2012), 3.42, Kindle.

⁴⁶ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1998), 113.

more, this calling to service is to take place both within the church—for the sake of others in the church—and within the world, as we reach out personally and with the community of faith to impact the world for Christ.

The role of the church in our spiritual life and development cannot be overstated. John Calvin went so far as to insist that, as God is our Father, so the church is our Mother. In the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, he writes,

Let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, no, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in her womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts and, in short, keeps us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Mt 22:30). For our weakness does not permit us to leave her school until we have spent our whole lives as scholars.⁴⁷

This is a fitting image, don't you think? Since our life of faith begins through the church as we hear and respond to the gospel preserved and proclaimed by the church; as we continue to grow and gain spiritual health through the care, encouragement, love, teaching, and correction we receive from the church; and as we head out into the world to live a life of holiness and service, we will always need the guidance, support, and prayers of the church. It is a *relationship* that sustains us our entire Christian life.

This means, of course, that every Christian has a vital role to play in the church for the sake of others. To say we need the church to find life and growth in the Christian faith is

⁴⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 674.

simply to say that we need one another, since together we are the church. “Once we understand discipleship in the broader sense of helping one another live our Christian lives,” pastor Stephen Smallman has said, “then the absolute necessity of the church community comes to the foreground.”⁴⁸ I am to look for instruction and care *from* other members of the church even I am to offer love and guidance *to* other members of the church. This is precisely what we hear in the Word of God. We are to “care for” one another (1 Cor 12:25), “encourage” one another (1 Thes 5:11), “admonish” one another (1 Thes 5:14), “love” one another (Jn 13:34), “pray” for one another (Jas 5:16), and the like. Bottom line: we are to be ministers to one another inside the church even as we serve as ministers to those outside the church.

This is what believers in the Reformed tradition, along with many others, refer to as the “priesthood of all believers.” Hear how this is described in *Reformed: What It Means, Why It Matters*: “All believers share in the special calling of being Christ’s representatives on earth. We do that in different ways. Clergy, priests and ministers do it one way. Factory workers, nurses, and lawyers do it in other ways. But we all devote our life and our life’s work to God’s service. That makes all of us priests.”⁴⁹ In 1 Peter 2:5 we hear, “You, yourselves, like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus

⁴⁸ Smallman, 21.

⁴⁹ Robert De Moor, *Reformed: What It Means, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 2009), 45.

Christ.” Thus, the priesthood of all believers is an essential way of understanding our calling to service in the Christian life.

As you can hear, this means that the ministry of the church has not been entrusted solely to the hands of the ordained or “professional” Christians, as if the rest of the congregation has nothing to do but passively sit by to receive the ministry of the clergy. The meaning of the “priesthood of all believers” is that all Christians serve in ministry *together* and that the work of the church is a shared responsibility and a mutual necessity.

The reminder that all Christians are included in the priesthood of the church serves the churches as a healthy corrective, assuring us that there is no separation between the clergy and laity in the call to ministry. We are all believers. We all belong to Christ. Therefore, we are all His ministers. We simply fill different roles.

This is why, in 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul speaks about the different spiritual gifts that have been given to each individual person in the church. “Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them in everyone. To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4-7). The apostle Peter also calls upon the church, as individual believers, to view our personal

gifts as for the common good. “As each has received a gift,” he says, “use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pt 4:10).

What is clear in Scripture is that there are a variety of ways that Christians are called to acts of service, and that each one of us contributing our part is essential, not only to the health and purpose of the individual, but also to the vitality and work of the church as a whole. Comparing the church to a physical body, the Bible goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 12,

For the body does not consist in one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body...The eyes cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you,’...But God so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. (12:14-25).

If this is true for any local congregation, then consider how much more it is true for a smaller congregation that may have only one pastor—or only one part-time pastor. Because if the church is relying on *only* the pastor to carry out the mission of the church, then that church is seriously weak, not to mention much less effective, then when all the Christians in the congregation are actively involved in ministry.

Furthermore, as the Bible demonstrates, no one person receives all the gifts for the church. They are distributed among all the members as the Holy Spirit sees fit. This means that no one person—not even the pastor—is able to carry out the work of the church all on their own. And to try to do so, without enlisting the gifts and

responsibilities of others, would actually impede or even *rob* other church members of the essential work that God desires then to do, as ministers in the church of Christ.

This does not mean, of course, that we are all ministers in the same way. There is a division of roles prescribed in the Scriptures. These roles enable us to support and care for one another in our assigned ministries. Every member and every gift is needed for the church, but we also need some faithful and mature leaders to teach, guide, and care for us as we serve.

All Christians are ministers; but not all Christians are pastors.⁵⁰ And we are not all called to be leaders, at least not at first. We may first need a season of preparation and instruction in the faith; a certain time to grow in doctrine and wisdom, to increase in knowledge and humility, to gain in truth and love; and we will need opportunities to test and confirm our gifts and callings. In fact, all Christians need these things. For this we need the church. We need the church to help us become faithful and obedient disciples of Jesus Christ. This is the role of all our leaders in the church, including elders and deacons, along with the pastor.

In the Reformed tradition, our leaders in the church are men and women “called by God, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and elected by the church to fulfill leadership functions in

⁵⁰ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 882.

the church essential to the life and witness of the whole.”⁵¹ This is the function of not only the pastors, but of elders and deacons as well, who make up the consistory of the local church. They all share the work of leading and governing the church.

Now, let me state this as directly as I can. Fulfilling their vital tasks in ministry as elders and deacons in the church—as outlined in the Bible—is as crucial to the health and mission of the church as the pastor fulfilling his or her duties. As far as I know, every church in the RCA has elders and deacons serving on their consistory. But not every church in the RCA has elders and deacons living out their calling as given by God.

The consistory is not a “board of directors” elected to administer policies, to manage programs, to pay the bills, to care for the property, or to direct and evaluate the pastor in the performance of his or her duties. To be sure, they do these things—and need to do these things—but if this is all that they do, the church is impoverished because of it. Elders and deacons, as fellow ministers, are to personally join with the pastor in caring for the spiritual life and health of the church and community. I am convinced that a church cannot be healthy and grow, spiritually or otherwise, without all the leadership of the church—pastors, elders, and deacons—fulfilling their own God-given calling in the church.

⁵¹ Robert White, *The Ministry of the Elder* (New York: Reformed Church Press, 1996), 4.

The office of elder in the RCA is particularly responsible for the spiritual oversight of the congregation.⁵² According to the *Book of Church Order*, elders are “set apart for a ministry of watchful and responsible care for all matters relating to the welfare and good order of the church. They are to study God’s Word, to oversee the household of faith, to encourage spiritual growth, to maintain loving discipline, and to provide for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments.”⁵³ This ministry includes oversight of all other officers in the church, including the care of the pastor; assisting the pastor with good counsel; and even assisting the pastor in the visitation of all members and inquirers.⁵⁴

The ministry of elders in the RCA is complemented by the ministry of deacons. If pastors and elders are to be effective in their calling to service in their respective offices, concentrating their time and efforts on the spiritual life and health of their church and community, then the ministry of deacons is just as necessary and significant. In the book of Acts, in order to allow the apostles to devote themselves “to prayer and the ministry of the Word (6:4), others were appointed to a ministry of service to those in need. In this traditions, deacons in the RCA are servants, called by God, entrusted with a ministry of “mercy, service, and outreach” both within the church and out into the

⁵² White, 10.

⁵³ Reformed Church in America, *Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America* (2012), 12.

⁵⁴ *Book of Church Order*, 12

world.⁵⁵ Deacons are especially called to lead others in the church to pursue acts and ministry of care in Jesus' name.⁵⁶

One thing is clear: ministry is not carried out by the pastor alone. This can never be the case because there is simply too much work to do. I agree with Robert LaRochelle who in his book, *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church*, insists that there is no such thing as a "part-time" church even as there is no such thing as a part-time pastor. "The community of the church," he rightly states, "is a full-time reality."⁵⁷ As long as there are people who need to hear the gospel in our little neck of the woods, members who need to grow in faith and love in the Lord, neighbors who need our help and compassion, children who need to know the love of God, seniors who need a visit or assistance, a world that needs our prayers and witness...you get the idea. There is plenty of ministry to be done.

To this end, the pastor, along with everyone else, has been called to a particular role within the priesthood of all believers. It is to the work of the church and the work part-time pastor we turn next.

⁵⁵ Betty Voskuil, *The Ministry of the Deacon* (New York: Reformed Church Press, 2003), 2.

⁵⁶ Voskuil, 3-4.

⁵⁷ Robert LaRochelle, *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2010), 14.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) *Are all Christians called to full-time ministry? If this is true, in what way?*
- 2) *Can pastoral ministry ever be a part-time calling? Why or why not?*
- 3) *What is the meaning of the phrase “the priesthood of all believers”?*
- 4) *How significant is the role of elders and deacons in the church?*
- 5) *Are all churches “full-time” churches? Explain why or why not?*

PART TWO: THE WORLD OF THE *PART-TIME* CHURCH

Chapter 3

The Work of the Church

A calling to ministry, for all Christians—pastors and congregation alike—is a call to service within a local church. In the New Testament, the word *ekklesia* means “to call out.”⁵⁸ Jesus was the first to use the word *ekklesia* to refer to the church, applying it to the company of believers gathered around him who publically confessed that Jesus is

⁵⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 556.

Lord (Mt 16:18).⁵⁹ At its most essential level, you can say that this is who we are as Christians: those who, by the grace of God, have been chosen in Christ through the Holy Spirit to profess faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

A pastor named Edmond Clowney once called this the *Great Constitution* of the church.⁶⁰ In other words, if someone were to ask you, “What is the church?” the simplest, most basic answer you could give is to say: “The church is a gathering of people who profess that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.” This is who we are.

The Bible uses many images to represent the church, and they each contribute to providing a beautiful and hopeful picture of what this church of professing Christians is called to be. We are the children of God (Eph 5:1), the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16), to name a few. In fact, these are dozens of images of the church in the Bible that inform us and inspire us to be the magnificent church that God desires us to be. And they all to various degrees stress our vital relationship to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Head of the Church

This is so, because the church belongs to Jesus. Christ founded the church and gave us our identity (Mt 16:18), he paid for us with His blood (Acts 20:28), and personally

⁵⁹ Berkhof, 556.

⁶⁰ Edmund J. Clowney, *The Church* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 160.

identifies Himself with His church (Acts 9:4). He is the true “head” of the body, the church and our life and ministry flow from Him alone (Eph 1:22; Col 1:18); as such, Jesus has full authority over the work of the church.

This is to say: *Jesus is the true leader of every local church.* Saying this, allow me to preach for just a moment. Because this should be encouraging news for every congregation presently without a pastor, every church that is looking to call a new pastor, and every community of faith whose pastor is “at the other job.” Jesus is always leading the church. We are always on His mind. We are never left all on our own. Even when we do have a pastor, Jesus is still in charge. The church belongs to Him alone.

This means that Christ alone has the right to establish the mission of His church. Not the pastor. Not the elders. Not the members. Not the community. Only Christ. This is extremely important in any discussion about the mission of the church—the work we in a local church are directed to do by Christ. There are many competing voices, both within and outside the church, insisting that the church must get involved in any number of good causes (homelessness), community services (food pantry), and global needs (human trafficking). In other words, there are many people with many different ideas about what the church should be doing.

In response to this confusion, pastors Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert offer a helpful path forward in their book, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*:

At its most basic, the term *mission* implies two things to most people: (1) being sent and (2) being given a task. The first point makes sense because *mission*

comes from a Latin word (*mittere*) meaning “to send.” The second point is implied in the first. When sent on a mission, we are sent to *do something*—and not *everything*, either, but rather we are given a particular assignment...Even in the world around us, everyone understands that a mission is that primary thing that you are sent out to accomplish.⁶¹

These pastors make a distinction between the essential mission of the church on one hand, and the various other “good works” we may do as individual Christians on the other. They acknowledge that there are many things we as *Christians* are commanded by God to do in Jesus’ name this world, but that is not necessarily the work of the *church* as a whole.⁶² The work of the church, they insist, is much narrower and more focused than what is expected of individual Christians.⁶³

Smaller churches need to understand this distinction. So do part-time pastors. We as a church are not expected to do every good work that is needed in our world, or is asked of us by others, or even commanded by Jesus. The local *church* and the individual *Christian* have different work to do, although they certainly support and complement each other. As individual Christians, we may set out in ministry in any number of ways and settings—according to our own personal call to service—but as a local church, our calling is more precise. And as we will see, when the local church fulfills its own mission, then we as individual Christians are greatly built up and better equipped to accomplish

⁶¹ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 19.

⁶² DeYoung and Gilbert, 29.

⁶³ DeYoung and Gilbert, 233.

the good works we believe Jesus is calling each of us to personally pursue as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This is not to say that churches are to ignore people in need. Churches should be calling upon their members to serve in their communities and in this world as God directs them. They should be identifying and challenging areas of injustice, abuse and oppression wherever these are found. Even more, local churches—even joining with other churches—can be engaged in activities that meet the physical and social needs of others in loving and compassionate ways in the name of Jesus. But these should never crowd out the foundational mission of the church. We must always keep in focus our true biblical responsibilities as a church and what help we “may” provide others as a church.⁶⁴

Bottom line: it is a question of keeping our priorities in order. Especially as a small church, a major factor regarding our involvement in helping ministries is the fact that our small church’s resources are not unlimited, in either money or people. We cannot be all things for all people. This is paramount for a church with a part-time pastor. We have to make critical budget decisions, including how much we can pay our pastor, whether we can offer health coverage, what church programs and ministries we can finance, and how much financial support we can provide missionaries and local needs.

⁶⁴ DeYoung and Gilbert, 193.

In addition, with limited resources in terms of people as well as money, how much time and effort can we expend on serving the physical and social needs of our community will impact what can be directed toward meeting the pastoral and spiritual needs of the congregation and community. Knowing what the church has been established in to accomplish in the name of Jesus Christ, and keeping that purpose front and center in the life of the church, will help local church leaders and congregations make biblically discerning choices for the glory of God.

In the same way, this may also allow the bivocational pastor to prioritize his or her ministry in that church. When this happens, no doubt, both the church and the pastor will find more joy and satisfaction in ministry—by not feeling pulled in every direction. Instead, they can know they are living and serving faithfully to their call to ministry.

Making Disciples

This is so, because *making disciples* who profess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior is at the heart of what the church is commanded to do by Christ. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20). The single command of this passage is this: *make disciples*. The three dependent words—*go*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*—simply describe the ongoing aspects of this process of making disciples. This

process includes an intentional action (*go*) of helping people make a public profession of faith and becoming part of the church (*baptizing*) and nurturing them in the way of following Jesus as his disciples (*teaching*).⁶⁵

This is our *Great Commission*, commonly recognized as a foundational passage for determining the mission of the church. This is a work, we should note, that Jesus, himself, accomplishes through us. “When we consider that Jesus began with a statement of his authority and ended it with an absolute promise of his ongoing presence as this great work is undertaken,” pastor Stephen Smallman reminds us, “we can properly conclude that making disciples of the nations is a work that Jesus himself is doing through his church.”⁶⁶

Another passage often cited alongside this one to define the mission of the church is Matthew 22:37-40, often called the *Great Commandment*. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose-Driven Church*, combines the “Great Commandment” and the “Great Commission” to formulate what he calls the five

⁶⁵ Stephen Smallman, *What Is Discipleship?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 7.

⁶⁶ Smallman, 7.

purposes of the church: worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and teaching.⁶⁷

Many other pastors and authors have stated the same priorities of ministry, sometimes using slightly different terms (and sometimes a slightly different number of tasks) to describe the very same activities that serve our mission to make disciples. John Stott, for example, offers these same “purposes” for the church’s mission in his discussion of the early church, drawn from Acts 2:42-47. In *The Living Church*, he outlines the mission of the church by emphasizing four essential characteristics he gleans from this passage: we are called to be a *learning* church, a *caring* church, a *worshipping* church, and an *evangelizing* church.⁶⁸ He uses the term “caring” church to define his understanding of fellowship while his depiction of the “evangelizing” church also includes what others call outreach or mission.⁶⁹

I suggest that the ongoing process of making disciples would include at least these four foundational tasks: worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 102-103.

⁶⁸ John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 22-33.

⁶⁹ Stott, *The Living Church*, 25-26, 47-69.

⁷⁰ I prefer the term “evangelism” to describe the related tasks of evangelism and ministry, since I believe both these tasks must serve as a witness to the gospel—with deeds of ministry always accompanied by an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Another reason I like the term “evangelism” is to keep this activity in the forefront of the church. With all the other activities in the church, evangelism can easily be neglected, and even forgotten, especially when we use terms like “outreach” or “ministry” which can obscure what we are trying to accomplish.

Worship (the up-reach of the gospel) would include the weekly gathering of the church to ascribe worth to God, to be nurtured in our faith through Word and Sacrament, and to offer up prayers for ourselves, our community, and our world.

Discipleship (the down-reach of the gospel) includes all the activities of the church that develop and grow our knowledge and commitment to the Lord for all ages, enabling us to better live a life of holiness and service, maturing into the likeness of Christ.

Fellowship (the in-reach of the gospel) describes the various caring ministries of the church, especially to one another in the body of Christ.

Evangelism (the out-reach of the gospel) encompasses our deliberate and intentional witness to Christ, in word and deed.

This is the mission, the purpose, the cause, the reason for being—however we might like say it—of the church of Jesus Christ. This is what our Lord tells us to do. And, as you can no doubt see, this can be accomplished by a congregation of any size, large or small. I happen to agree with Rick Warren that nothing can revitalize a discouraged church faster than that church rediscovering its biblical purpose.⁷¹ I have discovered, firsthand, that this is true for pastors, too.

⁷¹ Warren, 81.

Even more, knowing and embracing this mission can help a small church and their pastor channel their attention, creativity, and energy on the quality of their ministry without being side-tracked by many lesser things. For the small church, *quality* often precedes *quantity*. Imagine putting our time and resources into providing *inspiring* worship, *joyful* discipleship, *authentic* fellowship, and *loving* evangelism. What kind of church would that be? I, for one, would expect that to be the kind of church that Jesus would be leading. Even more, that would be the kind of church I would certainly want to be a part of—and invite others to join with as well. How about you?

Questions for Reflection

- 1) *Can you give a simple, basic answer to the question: What is the church?" Give it try.*
- 2) *Who decides what the mission of your church is? What is this mission?*
- 3) *If worship is one aspect of the mission of your church, what are some others?*
- 4) *Does your church use the term "evangelism" to describe one aspect of the mission of your church? Why or why not?*
- 5) *Why is quality in ministry important, especially for small churches?*

Chapter 4

The Work of a Part-Time Pastor

The *Book of Church Order* states that a pastor of a local church is called by God to a ministry of service. Specifically, in the Reformed Church in America, pastors “are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the ministry of the Word of God. In the local church the minister serves as pastor and teacher of the congregation to build up and equip the whole church for its ministry in the world.”⁷² As you can hear, the *role* of this ministry is that of “pastor and teacher” with the *purpose* “to build up and equip the whole church for its ministry in the world.”

To Build Up and Equip the Church

We have seen that the mission of the church is to make disciples through worship, fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism. The minister, then, is called to “build up and equip the whole church” to accomplish this particular mission.

This is the minister’s own calling to service for the church. Like any other Christian, he or she may also have other places where they are called to serve outside the local church (home, community, denomination, even another occupation or a second church), but building up and equipping the local church “for its ministry in the world” is

⁷² *Book of Church Order*, 12.

what the congregation they are called to serve should expect from their minister. This is the pastor's calling within the local church, exclusively.

This is what is revealed in Scripture. Ephesians 4:11 states that God gave the church “pastors and teachers” for this particular service. Although some may view “pastors and teachers” as simply two names for the same ministry, I agree with John Stott who suggests that every pastor must be a teacher of the Word of God, but not all teachers of the Word of God need to be a pastor, such as those who serve in Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries.⁷³ This being said, I must stress that “pastor” and teacher” belong together in the ministry of the pastor in a local church since “the shepherding aspect of the ministry keeps us in touch with reality—with genuine issues and problems—as we teach the Word of God. To teach the Scriptures effectively we must apply them, and, with the Spirit's help, we can do this only as we are in touch with things as they really are in the lives of men and women.”⁷⁴

Teaching the Word of God is certainly the work of a pastor (1 Tm 3:2)—and it surely builds up and equips the church for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism—yet it is not the only thing needed by the church to fulfill its mission. It is not the only thing the church should require from its minister. Above all, as Ephesians 4:11 reveals, the church also needs a “pastor.”

⁷³ John R. W. Scott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 165-166.

⁷⁴ Prime and Begg, 31-31.

Glenn Daman, in *Leading the Small Church*, insists that “nothing is more fundamental and critical to the health of the church” than clarifying the role of the pastor in the church.⁷⁵ Although this applies to any church of any size, Daman emphasizes this absolute necessity for smaller churches. As we have seen, many churches today are being pulled in many different directions concerning their true calling and mission. But pastors are just as vulnerable to diversion and distraction. Many pastors are being asked to spend time and energy on matters within the church that may be peripheral or even unrelated to their biblical role in the church, not to mention the many areas outside the church that the pastor may be invited or expected to fill a role, often from the church members themselves. I have seen that the typical church places more demands on their pastor than the Bible does.⁷⁶

Whatever else may be asked of a pastor by their congregation (and community)—whether it is attending Rotary Club meetings, presiding over meetings of the property committee, or offering prayers at the Veteran’s Day parade, and the like—nothing should be allowed to replace, distort, compromise, or distract from this vital calling of the pastor. All the other so-called “duties” or expectations of a pastor can also be performed by some other office holder or member of a church. The pastor has something else that requires his or her time, energy, and attention as determined by God. Priorities must be established. Expectations must be realistic. Therefore,

⁷⁵ Glenn C. Daman, *Leading the Small Church: How to Develop a Transformational Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 17.

⁷⁶ See also: Gilder, 35.

clarifying the role of the pastor in the church is essential for enjoying a successful part-time arrangement for both the pastor and the congregation.⁷⁷

Shepherd

Stated plainly, a pastor is a “shepherd.”⁷⁸ The term “pastor” is derived from the Latin word for “shepherd.”⁷⁹ In the New Testament, as in Ephesians 4:11, the Greek noun *poimen*, meaning “shepherd,” is commonly translated into English as “pastor.”⁸⁰ Additionally, the Greek verb *poimeno*, meaning “to shepherd,” appears in the New Testament to describe the work of a pastor (Acts 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2) while the Greek noun for “flock” is used for the church (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Pt 5:2-3).⁸¹

This means, of course, that a pastor serves as a “shepherd” to a local church who is his “flock.” Yet it is necessary to note that the congregation is not primarily the shepherd’s flock. Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:17). He didn’t say, “Feed *your* sheep.” This demonstrates that a pastor is really an under-shepherd to Jesus, who is the true shepherd of the church.

⁷⁷ Stephen Norcross, “The Bivocational Option,” in *Inside the Small Church*, ed. Anthony G. Pappas (Baltimore, MD:Alban Institute, 2002), 67.

⁷⁸ The term “shepherd” can also apply to elders and their role in the church, especially in the Reformed tradition, where pastor and elders often can have similar and overlapping roles: the pastor as a “teaching elder” and the other elders as “ruling elders.” See: Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).

⁷⁹ Witmer, 2.

⁸⁰ Richards, 560.

⁸¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 299.

This image of the pastor as shepherd is essential for understanding how we are to exercise godly leadership and care for the church today, since this imagery is first applied to God, himself, in the Scriptures. “The LORD is my shepherd,” we hear in Psalm 23:1. Similarly, this shepherd imagery is used for earlier leaders of God’s people who were appointed to nurture and protect Israel, as under-shepherds, serving directly under the authority of God (Ps 78:71; Jer 23:2, Ez 34:11). In the New Testament, Jesus is the “good shepherd” who provides for and protects God’s flock (Jn 10:11-18). As leaders in the church today, pastors are to be “shepherds of God’s flock” which are under our care (1 Pt 5:2), closely following the pattern of pastoral ministry set by Jesus.⁸²

Several prominent models of this shepherding ministry have been proposed to outline the various areas that require the careful and ongoing attention of a pastor. Timothy Laniak proposes the areas of provision, protection, and guidance.⁸³ Donald MacNair employs the acronym “GOES” for guardian, overseer, example, and shepherd.⁸⁴ And Timothy Witmer prefers knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting for the essential areas of a shepherding ministry.⁸⁵ Each of these is certainly biblical, instructive, and practical in gaining a well-rounded picture of a pastor’s shepherding tasks. For our

⁸² Peter T. O’Brien, 300.

⁸³ Timothy S. Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flock: Rediscovering Biblical Leadership* (Matthews, NC: Shepherd Leader Publications, 2007).

⁸⁴ Donald MacNair, *The Practices of a Healthy Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publications, 1999).

⁸⁵ Witmer, 102.

purposes, I will propose a concentration on these vital areas: a shepherd must *heed*, *feed*, *lead*, and *need* in service to Christ for his sheep.⁸⁶

Heed

Even before a pastor can do anything else, he or she has to *heed*, that is, they must listen to, pay attention to, and yield to God in service for others in the church. This occurs in several ways. First, a pastor must heed the calling of God. This means we respond to God's voice in our calling to a particular ministry, to a specific flock, in a chosen time and setting.

We also heed the Word of God by grounding our person, conduct, and ministry firmly in the Scriptures. A pastoral life is filled with study and prayer. There is little a pastor can offer a church—even as it is impossible to biblically feed and lead the church—if the pastor lacks knowledge, maturity, and godliness in his or her own life. Some would insist that a church's greatest need is their pastor's own personal pursuit of holiness.⁸⁷ The truth that we as pastors are first sons and daughters of God who live our lives in answer to the Lord's call to us should come before anything else; this should be the church's greatest expectation for us since our calling, character and personal relationship with the Lord are central to our ministry.

⁸⁶ The categories of *heed*, *feed*, and *lead* are not original to me, but their origin has been lost. It is possible that I picked them up at a ministry conference many years ago. To these I have added *need* for reasons we will see below.

⁸⁷ Prime and Begg, 35.

Additionally, a shepherd must heed the sheep and their environment. In other words, a pastor spends time to get to know their congregation. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10:14). Getting to know, understand, and love the congregation and becoming familiar with their strengths and weaknesses, their needs and gifts, their setting and culture, their heritage and traditions enables a pastor to belong to that fellowship of Christians and to rightly know how to feed and lead them. As equally important, no more so than in a smaller church, the congregation is also given the opportunity to get to know their pastor and, God willing, to learn to love and trust their pastor to feed and lead them.

Feed

Another important aspect of shepherding a flock is to *feed* them. Jesus said, “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:16). Again, the Word of God takes a prominent position here. Nothing takes the place of sound biblical preaching and teaching in the life and health of a church. This is especially the case for small churches. When a visitor comes into our midst, what often compels them to return is the quality of the preaching and the welcome of the people. Too often in the small church, however, we expect visitors to respond to our friendliness regardless of the quality of the worship and preaching. If this is true for your church, I’ll ask you to think of this: there are many “friendly” churches out there; unfortunately, there are fewer churches that provide inspiring, biblical preaching. Our commitment should be to offer both.

Yet, this does not simply mean being dedicated to preaching and teaching, although these areas of ministry should never be neglected or underemphasized. As the apostle Paul instructs us all, as he speaks to the elders at Ephesus, the Word of God is given “in public and from house to house” (Acts 28:20). This means that sharing the truth of Scripture is not only the task of preaching but is also a prominent component of all pastoral care. In fact, as some have said, “Shepherding is synonymous with pastoral care. It is the practical, individual, and spiritual care of Christ’s people.”⁸⁸ Whether a pastor is preaching on Sunday morning, teaching a Bible study on Tuesday evening, visiting someone in the hospital on Thursday afternoon, counseling another person in their home on Friday morning, or is a guest in the home of a church member for a BBQ on Saturday, she or he is in position to feed the Lord’s sheep by the Word of God.

This takes place by word and by personal example. The apostle Paul commanded the believers at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The apostle Peter called upon all church leaders to be “examples to the flock” (1 Pt 5:3). This activity grows believers and equips the church by providing a continuing presence and spiritual nourishment well beyond Sunday mornings. As you can see, feeding the flock should occur not only in the church building but also “out in the field” where the people of God live and work, raise their children, and serve in their community.

⁸⁸ Prime and Begg, 143.

Lead

When a pastor is engaged in activities that heed and feed the flock as their pastor, they are then in a position to more confidently and effectively *lead* them. One important key to leadership is serving as an example, an aspect of ministry already seen under feeding the church, but it is just as valid here. If members of the church are going to understand their own “ministry” in terms of “service” then their pastor must be an example of true servanthood. In a similar way, if the pastor is going to train other leaders in the church, then the pastor must demonstrate exactly what that looks like in their own servant-leadership of the church.

This being said, this leadership is directed in fulfilling the mission of the church to make disciples through worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism. This is a leading in word and deed as the pastor both models this in their own life and calls other to join them—providing a vision of what God desires of us all. As Glenn Daman has said, “The church’s greatest need today, in terms of leadership, is men and women who have a biblical understanding of what God desires the church to become as both a reflection of the person of Christ and a dynamic influence in the world.”⁸⁹ To this end, the pastor as leader, particularly in a smaller church, will at the very least assist the congregation in focusing on mission priorities, establishing and empowering a biblical model of ministry for elders and deacons, setting up effective ministry structures (perhaps simplifying

⁸⁹ Daman, 126-127.

those that are already in place) and clarifying the expectations and priorities of the church and the pastor.

Need

Crucial to everything that has been said about the necessity to heed, feed, and lead the church as shepherds of the flock is the recognition that, above everything else, pastors are also sheep in *need* of care.⁹⁰ In Acts 20:28, the apostle Paul tells us, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” What is clear from this passage is that, in order to care for the church, pastors need to devote attention to their own spiritual life and health as well.

In the Bible, a pastor is instructed to “train yourself in godliness” (1 Tm 4:7), “to set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tm 4:12), to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (1 Tm 6:11) to “hold firmly to the trustworthy word as taught” (Ti 1:9), and to be models of “good works” (Ti 2:7), among other things. Paying careful attention, therefore, to living a life of prayer and dependence upon the Lord, keeping a Sabbath for ourselves, protecting time with family and friends, pursuing passions and interests that refresh and revitalize our body and soul, and utilizing all the means of grace God richly and graciously supplies through

⁹⁰ Another way of looking at this is with the image of the body of Christ. See: Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 88. Tripp makes this helpful point: “I think of it this way: if Christ is the head of his body, then everything else is just body, including the pastor, and therefore the pastor needs what the body has been designed to deliver.”

the church, is a vital task of every shepherd.⁹¹ In fact, all the tasks—to heed, feed, lead, and need—depend upon and complement one another. All should be expected of every shepherd, including part-time pastors.

These are all part of a part-time pastor's calling, the life and work that they should be expected by their churches to fulfill. By focusing on these areas of pastoral ministry, the local church will be built up and equipped for her own mission in this world to “make disciples” who, growing in faith and maturity in Christ, each fulfill their own calling as Christians in this life. By answering this call of God, we may all be faithful and fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) *What is the “purpose” of the pastor of your church?*
- 2) *If you were to make a job description for your pastor, what do you think must absolutely belong on the list of duties and responsibilities?*
- 3) *How important is sound, biblical preaching to your church?*
- 4) *For the shepherd model of ministry presented above—heed, feed, lead, need—which of these do you think is most important? Why?*
- 5) *What kind of care does your pastor need from your congregation?*

⁹¹ For an in-depth look at the *need* of a pastor, see: Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Burnout* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007).

PART THREE: A PARTNERSHIP IN *FULL-TIME* MINISTRY

Chapter 5

Mutual Expectations

One of the greatest areas of frustration in the life of a pastor is often the unrealistic expectations that churches place upon them. This is also one of the primary sources of conflict and disappointment, straining their relationship and undermining their ability to work effectively together. This goes both ways.

Pastors, too, can hold their churches to expectations that are range from farcical to fanatical. One pastor I know expected his congregation to supply the toilet paper for the parsonage he was living in with his family. Another pastor I know expected every member of his church to follow his vision for the church without hesitation or debate. After all, “God told him” what they needed to do, so that was that!

Way too often, the real difficulty lies in the fact that most expectations for the pastor and the church are unspoken—or simply assumed. This is true even during a search process for a part-time pastor. Churches may give their pastoral candidate the impression that they only want her to preach on Sundays, visit them in the hospital when they get sick, and offer pastoral care for their members when needed. Then, soon after she begins her ministry with them, she discovers that the adult Sunday School is

expecting her to lead their class every Sunday, the women's group would like her to offer a devotion at their meeting "when she has time" to spend with them, the consistory is asking her when she plans to start a youth ministry at their church, and the congregation believes that everyone who is either related to someone in the church or someone that they care about is to be treated as a "member" of the church and is expected to receive hospital visits, pastoral counseling, wedding and funeral services, and all the rest. The reality is: a "part-time" call to a small church of 50 members has now become for her a call to a much larger church of over 200 souls, and counting.

Needless to say, this is not what she signed up for! Even more, it is an impossible ministry for her to carry out well—especially while also needing to work as a Certified Nursing Assistant, 24 hours a week or more, in order to make ends meet. Neither this pastor, or her church, were satisfied with the end result. Yet, the situation I just described to you is a true story. And many more like it can be told.

The Expectations of the Church

So, what should a church expect from their part-time pastor? I suggest, at the very least, all the following:

- **Your pastor will be a person of strong character.** In the Bible, the qualifications for a pastor overwhelming stress a spiritual giftedness for ministry and the quality of his or her character. If your pastor is going to be an example for the

congregation, be authentic and believable when they share the Word of God, be someone the congregation can respect and follow in leadership, and be an attractive representative of the church in the community, then personal integrity is an absolute necessity.

- **Your pastor will sense God's calling to bivocational ministry.** This is a specific call—to this unique form of ministry—for your particular church—in loving response to God's will for their life. They are not looking to be anyone else, or serve anywhere else. They will not settle for anything less than what God desires for them, even if it is a bigger church with greater status for more money.
- **Your pastor will believe and preach the Word of God.** It is God who creates, nourishes, grows and leads His church through His divine Word. No church will be healthy and grow, in either spiritual depth or numerical strength, without a devotion and obedience to the Bible.
- **Your pastor will be a person of prayer.** No pastor is able to lead or care for the church on their own. No pastor has the wisdom or strength, or has enough love or patience, equal to the task. It is too great—and too holy—for a mere mortal to handle. Your pastor needs the power and presence of God that only comes through the grace of prayer.

- **Your pastor will love the people of the church.** Everyone in the congregation, and every person in the community, will be known by your pastor as those who God so loves that Jesus suffered and died on the cross for their sake. This love will flow through and direct their ministry and be clearly evident in their life.
- **Your pastor will provide pastoral care to the church.** This is a ministry of presence as much as it is a sharing of biblical truth, comfort, teaching and correction. Time and attention should be intentionally devoted to this needed ministry.
- **Your pastor will provide leadership to the church.** This will be done mutually and cooperatively with the other designated leaders of the church. The mission of the church will be kept in sharp focus while specific programs and goals appropriate for your church will be initiated.
- **Your pastor will train people for ministry.** This includes the instruction and development of elders and deacons as well as teaching and training the members of the congregation to utilize their gifts for ministry.
- **Your pastor will agree upon the duties and expectations of their ministry with the church.** This will begin with conversations with the search committee, be followed by honest discussions with the consistory, and then forever be communicated to the entire congregation. These responsibilities must be well-

defined, designating not only what is expected of the pastor, but also articulating specifically what is not—like not requiring the pastor to attend ecumenical events, to be present at all the church suppers, or to preside over budget committee meetings.

This does not mean, of course, that part-time pastors should never be expected to teach adult Sunday School classes, attend ecumenical events, order the church supplies for worship, make copies of the Sunday bulletin, or complete a variety of other needed tasks for the church. Someone has to do these things. Yet, it all depends upon what has been mutually agreed upon as the specific responsibilities of your pastor.

Additionally, the actual amount of time the pastor is expected to serve within the church must be considered. And valued. If the pastor is expected to start a youth group in the church, for example, then it is likely that something else—like leading a mid-week Bible study or taking communion to the shut-ins—has to be sacrificed, or someone else has to assume ownership for that need. This is only being fair to your part-time pastor. A church should honor the fact that they have *not* called a full-time pastor.

The Expectations of the Part-Time Pastor

Every pastor has expectations for their church. And they are not always biblical or realistic. When I first became a pastor, I was extremely disappointed to find that my church didn't hang on my every word, wasn't always eager to love their neighbor as

themselves, didn't believe I walked on water, and wasn't always nice to one another (not even to me!). But the problem wasn't them; the problem was me. They were simply being a people saved by grace and needing to grow, day by day, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. In other words, they were just like me. But I expected more.

So, what should a part-time pastor expect from their church? Here is what I suggest:

- **The church will pray for their part-time pastor.** As I said earlier, your pastor needs God's help to be an effective servant-leader to the church. Even more, just knowing that people in the church are personally committed to praying for them is often the greatest source of encouragement, support and blessing you can give them.
- **The church will accept the leadership of their part-pastor.** Some small churches are reluctant to share leadership with their pastor. They may have had a steady stream of short-term ministers in the past; they may have experienced such a long period of time between pastors that other leadership has emerged, leadership that will not step down or let anyone else assume authority; or they may resist the leadership of their new pastor until, at some time in the far-distant future, their pastor somehow proves worthy of their trust. But few pastors will remain long at a church that will not listen to their suggestions, take seriously their ideas, or share their vision for the church.

- **The church will care for their part-time pastor and family.** Like the other members of your church, your pastor and their family need the love and care of your community of faith. They have stresses and problems, issues and challenges, the need to belong and be appreciated—just like every other family in the church. Sometimes even more so, given the high expectations that are often placed upon them.
- **The church will have realistic expectations for their part-time pastor.** No pastor can complete a day's work and rest easy that there is nothing further that needs to be done. There is worship to plan, a sermon to prepare, a meeting to get ready for, a Bible study to work on, people to pray for, hospital visits to be made, phone calls to return, e-mails to read, and supper to make. I'm sure I am forgetting something. This is even more challenging for a bivocational pastor. Knowing truly what is expected, from week to week, season to season, is absolutely necessary.
- **The church will serve as ministers alongside their part-time pastor.** This includes elders and deacons fulfilling their role as outlined in the Scriptures along with other members of the congregation stepping up and using their gifts for the benefit of others.

- **The church will understand their pastor is part-time.** This means they are willing to give and receive ministry in the church from someone other than their pastor. Also, it means they will recognize that there will be times when their pastor is not immediately available to them, so more flexibility and grace will be required from them by their pastor.
- **The church will support the work of ministry with their attendance and giving.**
The church is only as useful to God as we are willing to give our time, talents, and treasure to His service. Nothing energizes a pastor more than seeing the enthusiasm of their congregation for worship and contributing to the mission and growth of the church.
- **The church will do their best to pay their part-time pastor.** This means that the church will attempt to compensate their pastor the best they can, not the least they can. Sometimes I get the impression that, during discussions about salary, some church leaders are actually trying to purchase a pastor for the cheapest price possible—like buying a used car. (What's the old saying?—"You get what you pay for!") It is often very obvious and disheartening for the pastor. Instead, the church should prayerfully consider what is the most they can pay their pastor in salary, housing, health coverage and the like, being as flexible and creative as possible, and then tell their pastoral candidates that they are doing just this.
That church, which demonstrates its desire to give their very best to their new

pastor, will most likely receive the very best from new pastor in return. It is an honorable way to begin in ministry together.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Are the “Expectations of the Church” listed above appropriate and realistic?*
- 2) Would you add or subtract anything? What is it and why?*
- 3) Are the “Expectations of the Part-Time Pastor” appropriate and realistic?*
- 4) Would you add or subtract anything? What is it and why?*
- 5) How would you share these with your congregation?*

Chapter 6

The Essentials

I don't believe gospel ministry is all that complicated. It is not easy, but it certainly is not complicated. In fact, it is pretty straight-forward. As we've discussed, as Christians we have all been called to salvation in Jesus Christ and have been given the command by our Lord and Savior to “make disciples.” We have even been instructed in how we are to go about this: worship, fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism. God has even provided pastors, elders, deacons and fellow believers to help us fulfill our purpose. He

has joined us together as His church to live and work with one another for our good and for His glory. Like I said, there is nothing complicated about this.

We can make ministry harder than it should be. God has revealed to us a simple plan, but we—especially church leaders—are inclined to seek new ways, new ideas, new programs, new inventions, new procedures, new “paradigms” (I hate this word) in order to improve upon (I’m being kind) or get around (I’m being less kind) what God has called us to do. The result is almost always a real mess. We miss the mark we were aiming for. Why? We lose sight of who we are, what we are trying to accomplish and, all too often, who we are called to serve—Christ and His church.

I hope that what I have presented so far has not made a mess of things. Calling a part-time pastor is not that complicated. Yes, it takes a great deal of time, effort, and cooperation; but that is true of all Christian endeavors. Yes, it does require a right understanding of the biblical teachings on the mission of the church, the role of pastor, and the ministry of all believers; but that is just basic theology every Christian should know, anyway. And, of course, it does rely upon prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit, and paying attention to how the Word of God directs us to proceed; which is common Christian practice after all. This is all I have tried to follow.

In light of this, what follows is what I hope to be an uncomplicated summary of what this entire work has been about. These are the essential areas that need careful

attention in order to provide and maintain a healthy relationship between a church and their part-time pastor. There are 7 of them, all beginning with the letter “C” in order to help you remember them. I call them the “7 C’s” for calling a part-time pastor. I know some of my colleagues will laugh at me for choosing to use alliteration here (I can hear you, Fred and Steve!), but I have found this system helpful as I worked through this subject, so I present it to you this simple way.

1) Christ

Always remember, your church belongs to Jesus. You belong to Jesus. He alone is the Head of the Church. He is the true leader in the church. As you are calling a pastor, know that you already have a leader for the church. Christ is present with you now. And even after you call a part-time pastor, Jesus will still be the *full-time leader* of the church. Having a pastor doesn’t change this.

Also remember, Jesus declared, “I will build my church” (Mat 16:18). Although we all should desire a growing church and work for a growing church—to *make disciples*-- ultimately the outcome rests in the will of God. Our task is to be faithful to our calling, whatever size we are right now, trusting that Christ will do the rest according to His good pleasure.

The part-time pastor you seek to call will have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Their life and ministry will be led by a great love and devotion for our Savior, a joyful obedience to our Lord, and a passionate commitment to His

church. Everything else about your pastor and their ministry with you will proceed from this vital relationship with Christ. Therefore, let me emphasize, all church leaders will do well to inquire at length about the faith and life of every pastoral candidate.

2) Calling

Your pastor should feel a calling to a part-time ministry. This is not something they are just doing because they can't find a full-time call. They know this is precisely what they are meant to do. They are even willing to work another job in order to be able to serve a smaller church that may not be able to afford to have a pastor with them otherwise.

Even more, they sense a calling to serve with your particular church in ministry. This is the people and place that your pastor believes would truly please God for him or her to serve among, using the gifts and training that God has provided to build up and equip the church for works of ministry. A search committee should hear a pastoral candidate articulate this sense of calling to serving as a bivocational with a church like your church. It needs to be apparent that a particular candidate for your ministry is "all in" and is not just biding time with you, waiting for something else to open up or some other opportunity to come their way.

In the same way, the church must also understand that you are called to a ministry with a part-time pastor at this time in your church's history. The fact that Christ is calling a pastor to serve in your church is proof that God has good intentions for your church. That God has plans for your church. That perhaps the best years of your church may not be in the past, but just ahead, in ways we can't imagine.

3) Confidence

There are many churches today that are served by part-time pastors. Tens of thousands of them in the United States alone. Even countless more throughout the world. And so many of them are healthy, thriving, and sharing the good news of salvation with their neighbors. These are good, faithful churches. *Biblical churches. Churches we would be sure God was working through and we would be excited to be a part of no matter what size they are.*

Church history, our history, is filled with these small yet vibrant and hopeful congregations. God has always done mighty things through them. Some would say that small churches have been the primary way God has been saving people all throughout the years. And, if what we see in small churches today is any indication, I don't believe this is going to change anytime soon. In truth, we can be confident that God can use even the smallest, weakest vessel on earth to do

great things in His name. The Bible says He has been doing just that, through us, from the beginning (1 Cor 1:26-31).

4) Clarity

Focus. Focus. Focus. It must be kept, first of all, on your mission as a church.

Nothing should be allowed to distract or side-track you from the purpose for which you were called—to make disciples. This mission should be clear to the congregation, to the pastor being called, and to every other leader in the church, especially to those directly involved in calling your new pastor. After all, if you don't know why the church exists, what are we calling a pastor help you to do? What do you plan to achieve together?

Focus should also be concentrated on formulating *appropriate and realistic* expectations for your part-time pastor and the church. The “job description” should not be vague but highly specific, from the number of Sundays a year the pastor should preach and even down to the amount of time each week the pastor is expected to spend on sermon preparation, “office work” or home visitation. This then needs to be communicated widely to the whole congregation in an effort to avoid, as best we can, misunderstandings and hurt feelings between some members of the church and the pastor.

5) Cooperation

Every church has a full-time ministry, and then some. This means that your pastor and every member of your church must each do their part. For a church that has a part-time pastor, this is even more urgent and essential. Leaders especially, meaning elders and deacons, have to step up to the plate and assume their biblical roles and responsibilities.

Collaboration will be the key to being a strong church. You will serve together well to the extent that ministry will be shared according to every person's calling, when everyone in leadership acknowledges the God-given position of everyone else, as an atmosphere of mutual respect and humility governs all consistory meetings, as a culture of honest and open communication is expected between your pastor and other leaders, and when service in the name of the Lord is encouraged for every member of your church. In other words, we as leaders, and as Christians, should conduct ourselves in manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:27). In this way, "the priesthood of all believers" will be built up in your church.

In addition, even before a new pastor arrives, the other leaders of the church need to decide to what extent they will honor the person they call as the "pastor" of the church. And they will need to decide to what extent they will allow the person they call as their pastor to "lead" with them. Do they want a

true *shepherd* of God, or do they merely want someone to perform the duties they assign to them, without input or question? Will the pastor be given a voice in deliberations? A say in decision-making? A place at the table? I would also advise that, when interviewing pastoral candidates, the church discovers that potential pastor's leadership style and their acceptance of the leadership of others. Do they accept the "priesthood of all believers" as a biblical characteristic of Christ's church?

6) Competence

As a shepherd for your church, you should require your pastor to be dedicated to some form of *heed, feed, lead, and need* model for pastoral ministry. This being said, these words that I use to describe pastoral ministry are not the main point; the mind-set and activities that they portray are what is essential. As you interview a pastoral candidate, they should not be expected to recite this group of words. But what they should be expected to do is tell you what is important to them as a pastor in each of these areas.

I urge church leaders to inquire about a potential pastor's intention to know and love your congregation and community and how they plan to go about this.

Also, do they rely upon prayer and the Word of God to guide their ministry? Do they cherish the Bible and are they dedicated to preaching the whole counsel of God? Do they offer personal counsel from the Word of God? You get the idea.

What is at stake, of course, is the spiritual care of your congregation and the health of your church. I believe, any person worthy of the title “pastor” will not only welcome such a conversation, but will be greatly attracted to a church who engages them in a deep discussion about these important matters.

7) Compensation

The main idea here is to be honest, fair, and creative. This pertains to the church and to the pastor. Don’t make it a negotiation between two competing parties; instead make it an exploration of the best way to enter into a *partnership in the gospel* together for the benefit of the church. What does this look like?

Basically, you all sit down together to come up what is mutually beneficial.

Remember, the part-time pastor has already agreed not to be fully compensated by the church, has already committed to working another job to serve your church, and has already relinquished many benefits of serving in a fully-funded ministry (like more time for sermon preparation, more days for visitation, more opportunities to attend conferences and church events, more flexibility in scheduling, and the like). In other words, this pastor has already demonstrated their dedication to serving as partners in the gospel with you.

You can show your dedication to serving in partnership in the gospel with them by representing the financial position of the church with integrity. One pastor I know was informed by the treasurer of his church that they only had enough

money to pay him for next three years, maybe less. He was told this *after* he began his ministry with them.

Another way to show your dedication is to offer what is right, financially speaking, for the amount of ministry you expect of them. If you really expect your pastor to serve in a “full-time” role in terms of hours per week, but you are only offering them compensation equal to “half-time” in terms of hours per week, you being dishonest and unfair. And to call it what it really is: you are sinning against your pastor and against God. Some churches do not intend to do this, but when they realize weeks or months later that this is precisely how this call is turning out, they often ignore it and do nothing about it. This, as you can imagine is a recipe for disaster.

Here is where creativity must come in. Perhaps you plan on calling a part-time pastor for “1/2” time. Yet your church cannot afford what is required for this. There are other benefits you can offer, rather than money. There may be a parsonage that can be used by the pastor. If the pastor will reside in the parsonage with full utilities paid by the church, but is only going to be “1/2” time, you are already providing a substantial benefit to the pastor. Therefore, the pastor may agree to the salary portion of the compensation being less than usual for “1/2” time. Think also about a pastor who makes a good living at their

other job. Maybe being offered more money will not appeal to them as much as being offered more weeks off for vacation or continuing education.

This may pertain to a retired pastor as well. With their pension, their own home, and a fire still in their belly to serve Christ and His church, a retired pastor who desires to serve “part-time” may an incredible find for your church. They have the time, the drive, they don’t require a fully-funded setting, and they have many years of experience to offer your church. A retire pastor might be an answer to some church’s prayer.

The same is true for a pastor who is already serving part-time in another church in your area and who is willing to receive an additional part-time call. Some *small churches will not even consider this option. I don’t really understand this.* Here, again, is an experienced pastor willing to serve with small churches. Even more, this pastor offers more immediate availability of their time and presence than most other part-time pastors who are working a “secular” job. In fact, the only time this pastor will be unavailable to your church members is when they are leading worship on Sunday morning at their other church. You can’t say that about me, for example. I work as an RN. And when I am working as an RN, I am definitely not available to the people of my church until my shift is over. All this is to say, there is more than money you can offer a potential part-time pastor for your church. In conversation with your candidates, you may discover an option

that works well for all of you as you seek to begin your partnership in the gospel.

Truly, church leaders who pay attention to these essential areas of part-time ministry will serve their church's well. They will honor their own calling to serve Christ and His church to the very best of their ability and affection. And they will look forward in faith to enjoying a healthy and fruitful ministry with their new pastor and, most of all, in hopeful expectation of God's blessing upon their church for years to come.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) *How might you apply these 7 "C's" to your pastoral search process?*
- 2) *Are there specific questions church leaders could ask potential pastors from each of these essentials categories? What would they be?*
- 3) *Are there specific questions part-time pastors should ask potential churches from each of these essential categories? What would they be?*
- 4) *In what ways should supervisors apply these 7 "C's" in their ministry to churches?*
- 5) *What is the ultimate goal for putting in all this time and attention?*

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